University of Alberta

A Hermeneutic Inquiry into the Meaning of Curriculum Change for Chinese Teachers

by

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in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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Department of Secondary Education

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Dedication

To Alex

To all those Chinese teachers who are currently living with and through significant educational change;

you have inspired this study.

Abstract

China, the developing country with the largest and oldest public education system, is transforming its education system through a large-scale curriculum reform. The new national curriculum marks a dramatic change in the underlying educational philosophy and practices, which, in turn, have deep cultural and historical roots in Chinese society. During this system-wide curricular change, Chinese teachers find themselves, more or less, situated in an ambivalent space. That is, most teachers know of the curricular change, but they are uncertain about the meaning of the change and have some resistances borne out of the experiences of loss and challenges to their teacher identities.

This study investigates what this massive curriculum reform means for Chinese teachers by grounding an enquiry in in-depth conversations with six teachers in Western China. An interpretation of these conversations reveals the complex dimensions of teachers' compliance and/or resistance with respect to change at a time when the Chinese curriculum landscape is shifting dramatically from a local to global perspective. Hermeneutics is employed as the research approach in this study because it attends to the humanness and interpretive nature of the participants' living through curriculum change and it offers important

insights to the deeply inter-subjective nature of teachers' learning and unlearning.

New understandings of teachers' identity transformation, cross-cultural curriculum conversations, and the psychic and social dynamics of teachers' learning are presented in this study. New discourses for enhancing cross-cultural understandings in curriculum studies and international development are also suggested. This study addresses an absence of research on education change and curriculum theories and serves as an example of engaging curriculum as a transnational conversation between East Asian and Western contexts.

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CHAPTER 1 THE FUNDAMENTAL QUESTION IN CURRICULUM CHANGE

Accomplishing educational and societal reform in today's world is a challenge of enormous complexity.

M. FULLAN, 2005, P. 1

Although the curriculum of basic education in China has experienced several waves of change since the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, the past changes have never been as profound as this recent one.

Q. ZHONG, Y. CUI, & H. ZHANG, 2001, P. 3

Introduction

For several decades, education reform and curriculum change has been a global phenomenon. Countries such as Canada, the United Kingdom, the United States, and Australia have gone through large-scale curriculum reforms (Carson, 2006; Hargreaves, 2005). Much research on education and curriculum change has been conducted since late 1960s and literature on systematic large-scale change is readily available and valuable; however, the existing knowledge is not sufficient to address the unique problems and challenges that educators confront in China, where an unprecedented nation-wide curriculum reform is undertaking. The daunting challenges and issues identified in the historical, social, cultural

and complex contexts demonstrate that the conventional change discourse lacks an adequate sense and theory of how and why teachers act (and react) as human beings when faced with significant curriculum changes (Carson, 2006).

Currently, China is undertaking an unprecedented nation-wide Basic Education (K-12) Curricular Reform. The *new national curriculum* shifts dramatically, for teachers and students, from traditional Chinese education values and practices, and, therefore, is creating tremendous challenges for teachers whose identities have been shaped by traditional Chinese educational philosophies and practices. Chinese teachers have been charged with a collective task of translating the new national curriculum into pedagogical actions, which demands new understandings of teaching and learning, new pedagogic relationships with students, new relationships with curricula knowledge, skills, and attributes, and new identities for the teacher and the learner. Chinese teachers are situated in an ambivalent space between the demands of the new curriculum standards and the old pedagogical traditions, and between new educational expectations and responsibilities and traditional schooling and community expectations. Teachers' ambivalence, uncertainty, and resistance in implementing the new curriculum seem to be further

intensified by the unsettling theoretical and philosophical debates held by well-known educators in China regarding the *appropriateness* of the new curriculum and what it demands of Chinese educational traditions.

My research intent is to understand how a group of Chinese teachers' identities are being challenged and transformed during this time of a nationally-imposed curricular change initiatives, because "it is precisely the identity of the teacher that is being re-negotiated in socially transformative educational reforms" (Carson, 2006, p. 6). Also, I intend to demonstrate how rigorously exploring teachers' lived experiences, including the feelings of loss, ambiguity, anxiety, and resistance, can be taken up as pedagogical moments and learning possibilities in curriculum change negotiation and interpretation. During this period of change, new educational philosophies and concepts are being introduced to China to support this unprecedented curriculum change. How are these foreign theories and epistemologies being received by Chinese teachers? And, how are the Chinese wisdom traditions being located in this massive education change in terms of teacher abilities to conscientiously implement these new curricula?

The chapter following provides a historical and contextual overview of the Chinese education system in relation to the new round of

curriculum reform.

An Overview of Educational Traditions in China

In order to understand the nature, scope, and complexity of undertaking the current national basic education curriculum reform in China and its influences upon teachers, it is necessary to look at the historical traditions in Chinese education and examine what we can learn and unlearn from the past.

China has a long and rich tradition of education and the roots of the education system in China can be traced back at least as far as the 16th century B.C. and the later Shang Dynasty (1523-1027 B.C.). Over the course of its long history, formal education in China evolved alongside the broader Chinese culture, which is influenced and shaped by Chinese philosophical traditions represented by Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism (Zhang & Zhong, 2003). Amongst these traditions, Confucianism has had the most significant impact on Chinese education (Gu, 2006; Li, 2005). Confucian teachings, preserved in the *Lunyu* or *The Analects of Confucius*, form the foundation of much subsequent Chinese thinking on education and social conduct, including the importance of moral concepts in education, how an individual should live and interact

with others, and the forms of society and government in which the individual should participate.

Chinese educational system has always been characterized by a strong tradition of competitive examinations, which has a history of more than four thousand years (Li, 2005). Originating as far back as 2200 B.C., competitive exams were used to recruit imperial/governmental officials and success in the examination system is the only path towards prestigious social status. Examination-oriented education system has not been stable through ancient and present times in China, but "the examination culture has been woven into the social fabric of the Chinese people's everyday's life" (Li, 2005, p. 50).

As a result, teaching and learning in Chinese schools has traditionally focused on helping students achieve good exam scores in standardized tests at various levels. The emphasis on exams also contributed to the content-oriented nature of teaching and learning in schools. Because the ancient exam systems focused on the memorization and interpretation of classical texts, contemporary education systems also developed around emphasizing drill practice and memorization. The impact of examinations is so profound to both Chinese education and social life that it is sometimes called the "fifth great invention" of China (Li, 2005, p.28).

Historically, Chinese education has centered on great texts and great teachers (Hui, 2005; Zhu, 1992). Confucius (551 - 479 B.C.), respected as a *Sage* by the Chinese people, has had a profound impact on the educational and social values in China for over 2,000 years. He taught that all people possessed the same potential, and that education was the corrective means to curb any tendencies to stray from ethical behaviour. As a teacher, Confucius made education available to students from all classes. Education in China has thus been an equalizing force from ancient times. It became the means by which individuals from even the humblest backgrounds could rise to great heights.

Confucius stressed the importance of virtue and natural order in a civil society and developed a series of standards and concepts for social conducts and moral values. Two hundred years after his death, Confucius and his philosophy of education, ethics, and moral standards were emphasized by the imperial government as a powerful mechanism for implementing the ethical and social norms of Chinese society. Confucian Classics were infused into curriculum and became the core content of the Civil Service Imperial Exams, during which candidates had to demonstrate accurate memorization of a vast amount of classical material but were never required to demonstrate the ability to either theorize or

challenge its content. This tradition lasted till the end of Ch'ing dynasty in early twentieth century.

The impact of this historical context has been tremendous, leaving a lasting effect on educational practices in China and social concepts of who teacher and students are; and, what they are expected to do. For instance, the Chinese term for teacher is 老师, literally meaning *old master*, reflecting a teacher's traditional authority and the source of knowledge (Hui, 2005). A good teacher in China is distinguished by possessing an exceptional amount of knowledge and conducting him or herself as a moral model for students and society (Watkins & Biggs, 2001). A teacher's moral character (enacting qualities such as discipline, enthusiasm, initiative, selflessness, and commitment) and his/her strong caring for students are as important as their repertoire of knowledge and instructional skills. The profession of teaching in Chinese is 教书 (or teaching the book), which implies the importance of texts or textbooks in teachers' professional lives. It is traditionally believed by Chinese people that knowledge lay in the teacher and the texts, and the teacher's role was that of expert and lecturer, giving definitive interpretations of the texts. Students are expected to receive the teacher's knowledge as it is presented. Developing abilities of applying that knowledge in real life situations is

not an essential part of learning or teaching.

Despite the efforts of reforming Chinese traditional education by Chinese governments since the beginning of 20th century, the education inheritance distinguished by examinations, text-focused teaching and learning, and authoritative pedagogies is still pervasive in Chinese schools today.

The Constant Changing Education Landscape in Contemporary Chinese History

Throughout its long history, education in China has remained as a highly centralized system dominated by Confucian tradition of merit and a structure of hierarchical examinations. Starting from the late nineteenth century, after China's successive military defeats by Japan and encroachment by the Western powers such as United Kingdom, France, Germany, United States of America, Spain, Portugal, Denmark, and Sweden, the tottering imperial government of the time realized (under the pressure of the education reformists) the importance of learning new technologies through an improved educational system and there was a movement initiated to promote Western education in the traditional examination system to restore its power (Pepper, 1996). Since then,

western education was introduced to China and a series of radical education reforms have been undertaken as efforts to develop China's modern school system. To further provide a historical background for the current basic education reform in China, this section provides a brief review of the four stages of education reforms in modern Chinese history (Zhang & Zhong, 2003) and their influences on Chinese education and curriculum development, implementation, and evaluation.

The first stage of educational reform refers to the period of more than 20 years (1921-1949) when China was governed by the political party of Kuomingtang (KMT). In 1919, John Dewey, the most influential contemporary authority on Progressive Education, visited China at the invitation of the first Chinese doctoral graduates from Teachers College, Columbia University. His educational philosophy strongly influenced Chinese educational practice and theory thereafter. In 1922, the Ministry of Education in China issued a new *National Education Plan* based on recommendations of the American influenced Federated Education Association of China (Cleverley, 1991). Under the influence of American educational theories and systems, the Chinese educational system was restructured into a 6-3-3-4/5 model following the American systems and structures (Meng & Greogory, 2002). Formal education was changed into

six years of elementary school, three years of junior high, three years of senior high, and four or five years of university education. Li (2005) argues that Chinese curriculum at this time was basically a copy of American curriculum with seven re-established objectives: education for social change, democratic education, individuality, economic livelihood, universal education, local adaptation, and education for life.

The education system during this period was not stable because of Japanese invasions (1937-1945) and the Civil War between the KMT and the Communist Party of China (CPC). Though these education change efforts greatly reduced the antagonism toward and suspicion of modern Western schooling, Cleverley (1991) argues that educational deficiencies were more apparent than achievements during this period. The mode of teaching and learning remained the same as it was in the past because teachers did not have the skills required by the new content, subjects, or pedagogical demands due to the shortage of training opportunities and resources relating to modern content and pedagogy. Cleverley (1991) comments that Chinese education in this period was "more foreign in its high branches than it was Chinese" (p. 69).

The second stage of critical curriculum change started in 1949, when the Communist Party of China (CPC) took power from the KMT and

founded the People's Republic of China. Following Marxism-Leninism, the CPC government initiated a new socialist-oriented national education reform in 1951 and adopted the former Soviet Union education model. Schools were reformed into a 5-5-4 model, that is, five years of elementary school, five years of secondary school, and four years of university education. Curriculum as an instrumental framework of socialist ideology was administered under a highly centralized system with various bureaucratic management levels; curriculum was treated as instructional content, which was disseminated as lesson plans, syllabus, and textbooks; curriculum decision making was highly centralized, and teachers and schools had no power in this decision making process. Western curriculum studies were strictly excluded from China due to the difference in social and political ideologies.

During this second stage, the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution (1966-77) was the most unprecedented disastrous event in modern Chinese history. Education was one of the most affected sectors during this time. Most schools in urban China ceased regular operation for six years and universities stopped student recruitment for an even longer period of time. Teachers and students were sent to the countryside to learn farming and manual labour from workers and peasants. Most teaching

was suspended, many facilities in schools, universities, and colleges were destroyed, and intellectuals became the most disadvantaged group in society. Time spent on academic pursuits in schools and colleges was drastically cut back. School subjects were integrated and some disciplines and subjects, such as foreign languages, were dropped. Manufacturing and farming were retained as important components of the curriculum, especially in high schools. During the Cultural Revolution, traditional Chinese culture and philosophy represented by Confucianism, Daoism, Buddhism were completely excluded from education because they were condemned as a product of "The Four Olds" – old ideology, old culture, old customs, and old habits – and thus must be destroyed and replaced by an ideology or perception associated with *The Four News* – new ideology, new culture, new customs, and new habits (Lu, 1999).

After the Cultural Revolution ended in 1976, curriculum studies recovered in China and educational reform entered into its third development stage of the century. The economic reforms in 1980s brought about a series of reforms in education sector. From 1978-1989, several rounds of national curriculum change were planned and implemented to recover the education system destroyed during the Cultural Revolution. Basic education started to adopt a dual track schooling system. The

concepts of 重点学校 (key school) and 普通学校 (regular school) were introduced to and developed at all levels of educational jurisdiction - provincial, prefectural, county, township, and even village. Key schools employ highly qualified teachers, have much better educational resources, and admit elite students with better academic performance. Students graduate from key schools have a better chance to go to universities and colleges. Most students go to regular schools, which a large sector of public education system.

During this period, new curriculum plans and textbooks were developed, and education and curriculum theories developed in Europe and North America were re-introduced to China. Schools and universities become stable and curriculum content was updated, but the curriculum structure, administration, and evaluation still followed the former Soviet Union model. Teacher education programs were devoted to academic work related to subject areas but little focus on curriculum studies, pedagogy, and educational philosophy was offered for both pre-service and in-service teachers.

The fourth stage of curriculum change in China started in the late 1980s and became a vigorous and continuous event in the field of education due to the rapid social and economic development in China.

The Chinese government issued *The Central Government's Decision on Education System Reform* in 1985 and *The Compulsory Education Law of The People's Republic of China* in 1986 to strengthen the reform efforts in the education sector. In 1999, the State Council of the Chinese Central Government issued a benchmarking document entitled *Decision to Further Education Reform and Promote the Quality Education*, indicating the start of the most unprecedented basic education curriculum reform in Chinese modern education history.

During the above stages of educational reforms in 20th century in China, various western philosophies of education - Progressive Education, Behaviourism, Cognitivism, Constructivism, Post-structuralism - were introduced to China. These foreign educational philosophies are reportedly highly influential (Su, 1995), however, their influences appear to have been limited to the areas of policy and educational philosophy rather than classroom teaching practices (Hiebert, 2006; Mok, et al., 2001). Wang & Zhou (2002) comment that the educational reforms and educational philosophies in the past century in China lacked consistency, connectedness, and cultural 'fit' with Chinese educational system. They argue that the drive for modernization in these education reforms inherently undermined Chinese traditions and cultures (including

Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism) and transformed the Chinese society into one without collective value towards its own traditions. The constant educational reforms and curriculum changes in contemporary Chinese history have consolidated 'change' as the most widely acceptable discourse by the field of education; however, traditional Chinese education - textbook-focused teaching and learning, exam-based evaluation system, unchanged teacher-student relationship - remain pervasive in schools and educational practices.

The defects of the exam-driven educational system have been recognized by both Chinese government and citizens. In 2001, the Ministry of Education in China initiated an unprecedented educational change in contemporary Chinese history.

The New Curriculum Reform and its Demands for Teachers

Traditionally, Chinese basic education curriculum was designed and implemented towards knowledge-centered elitist education, which focused on students' knowledge and skills acquisition but neglected the development of students' abilities in scientific inquiry, problem solving, and creative thinking (Guo, 2002). As well, curriculum content was very complicated, difficult, and, often, outdated. With regards to pedagogy,

knowledge transmission and drill-teaching were the main instructional methods used by teachers. Students' utmost learning motivation was to pass the exam for a higher level of education and their interest in learning remained at a minimum level. Exam-based education system has been consistently criticized by the whole society because it brings great psychological pressures to students and their families and develops students with high marks but low creativity and ability to apply the knowledge in real life situations(Li, 2005).

To improve the educational system and quality as well as to prepare its citizens for an increasingly global society, the Ministry of Education in China released the *Basic Education Curriculum Reform Outline (pilot version)* in June 2001 and officially started the new round of nationwide curriculum reform for grades 1-12.

The essential rationale underpinning this new curriculum reform results from the changing economic and political contexts of China over the past 20 years (Feng, 2006). When the People 's Republic of China was founded in 1949, the central government adopted the planned economy and centralized governance from the former Soviet Union. In 1984, the Chinese government made a historic decision to shift China's economic system from the planned economy to the market economy. The dramatic

change of the economic system initiated consequent changes in political system towards decentralization and democracy. The changes in Chinese economic and political sectors called for a fundamental change in education, especially in the curriculum of basic education.

This round of basic education reform is anticipated to involve 474,000 schools, 10 million teachers, and 200 million students by the year 2010 (China Education and Research Network, 2005) and implemented by three steps:

- The first step is reform planning and preparation (1999-2001);
- The second step is piloting and revising the curriculum standards (2001-2004);
- The third step is new curriculum implementation and promotion in all schools (starting from September 2005).

The philosophy underpinning the new curriculum is 'for each student's development' (Zhong, Cui, & Zhang, 2001) and it calls for transformative changes in many aspects of Chinese basic education, including curricula structure, curricula standards and content, pedagogy, the development and use of textbooks and resources, curricula assessment and evaluation, curricula administration, and teacher education and development. The governmental policy Basic Education Curriculum

Reform Outline (pilot version) specifies the following six objectives of this new round national curriculum reform (Zhong, Cui, & Zhang, 2001):

1. *Develop a comprehensive and harmonious basic education system. Change the function of curriculum from knowledge transmission to helping students become active lifelong learners;*
2. *Construct new curriculum structure. Change the subject-centered curriculum structure into a balanced, integrated, and optional curriculum structure to meet the diverse needs of schools and students;*
3. *Reflect modern curriculum content. Reduce the difficulty and complexity of the old curriculum content and reflect the new essential knowledge, skills and attitudes that students need to be lifelong learners. Strengthen the relevance of the curriculum content to students' lives;*
4. *Promote constructivist learning. Change the passive learning and rote learning styles into active and problem-solving learning styles to improve students' overall abilities of information processing, knowledge acquisition, problem solving, and cooperative learning;*
5. *Form appropriate assessment and evaluation rationales. Curriculum assessment and evaluation shifts from its selective purpose to improving the quality of teaching and learning. A combination of formative and summative evaluation approaches is required in the new curriculum; and*

6. *Promote curriculum democracy and adaptation. Curriculum administration is decentralized toward a joint effort of central government, local governments, and schools to strengthen the relevance of the curriculum to local situations.*

These six objectives indicate the scope and complexity of this reform and represent a radical departure from traditional Chinese education. Joseph Schwab (1969), University of Chicago professor of education and natural sciences, defines four *commonplaces* of curriculum - learners, teachers, subject matters, and sociocultural milieu – and emphasizes that curriculum specialist must work with the representatives from each place to ensure that the commonplaces are properly coordinated because changes in any one will have consequences for the others. All four commonplaces and their relationships are required to be changed by the Chinese curriculum reform and the new ones differ dramatically from the prior ones. Consequently, Chinese teachers have to relearn many fundamental concepts and practices in education. For instance, teachers in the past were required to strictly follow 教学大纲 (teaching syllabi) - nationally prescribed subject reference materials with prescribed topics and teaching sequences - and textbooks in lessoning planning and classroom instruction because all standardized exams are based on

content included in these materials. This type of teaching, described as *Daizhe Liaokao Tiaowu (dancing with bonds)* (Zhong, Cui, & Zhang, 2001), is controlled and driven by uniformly imposed 'official knowledge' in the form of syllabi, textbooks, examination and evaluation systems, policies, and regulations. These discursive educational practices have defined teachers' philosophy of teaching and learning, purpose of teaching and learning, curriculum understanding, instructional strategies, and pedagogical relationships. Although the new curriculum has granted teachers more space to interpret curriculum based on local contexts and their students' situations, teachers still feel obligated to follow the textbooks and view the curricula standards as changed versions of subject syllabi.

Conventional curriculum orientation, habitual teaching and learning styles, and the new curriculum requirements manifest not only numerous challenges for teachers, but also tremendous learning and uncertainty. While teachers are trying to develop new pedagogic strategies in practice, they are simultaneously re-examining their beliefs about teaching, learning, and the meaning of being a 'good' teacher. All teachers are required to attend a certain number of professional development workshops and sessions to learn about the new curriculum before actually

implementing it in classrooms; however, most of these workshops and sessions being delivered through lectures and theoretical readings have shown unbalanced deliberations in curriculum understanding and implementation - either dominated by a single curriculum commonplace or omitting some – and caused either successive *bandwagon* effect or greater confusion about the new educational philosophy and concepts based on an exclusive theory (e.g., of constructivism, postmodernism, education change process, child development, teacher needs, subject matter innovation, or social change).

The changes demanded by the new curriculum are clearly not easy to make for all educators in China because it involves transformative changes in their identities, which is one of the most difficult changes have been identified during the implementation process (Zhong, 2006). Ultimately, the success of education change has to be demonstrated in classrooms, in teachers' understanding of the new curricula, and in their capacity of interpreting the new curricula into actions. These collective tasks faced by Chinese teachers have inspired me to look into their lived experiences in education change to understand what the change means to them and the dynamics of the processes of change occasioned by implementing the new curriculum.

The Missing Piece of Research Puzzle on Educational Changes

The body of educational change knowledge has significantly expanded, in the West, during the last three decades (Fullan, 2006; Hargreaves, 2005; Sahlberg, 2006). According to Hargreaves and Goodson (2006), education reform has gone through three consecutive phases. The first was the age of optimism and innovation (up to the late 1970s). Growing student populations and economic growth in this era promoted optimism about individual emancipation and technological enhancement through education. Education reforms during this period were large-scale and aimed to increase teachers' professional autonomy and school improvement and innovations. The second phase was the age of complexity and contradiction (late 1970s to mid-1990s). Education reforms focused on increasing external control of schools, inspections of teaching and learning, and evaluations and assessments led to an increase of regulations in schools but decrease of the autonomy of teachers. There was a need for inclusive approaches and shifting the emphasis to learning for all because student populations became more diverse. The third phase is the age of standardization and marketization (mid-1990s to date). Education reforms have been designed based on centrally prescribed

curricular, on learning standards monitored through intensive assessment and testing, and on increased competition between schools. Therefore, teachers are losing their professional autonomy and learning is being focused on successful performance in standardized tests.

This existing body of change literature in the West has extensively focused on the stages of educational changes, the responses of individuals to change initiatives, and the key strategies and processes to achieve change; however, it didn't show the expected improvement brought by these ongoing education change efforts (Hargreaves, 2006). Many change strategies have not proved to be sustainable and most curriculum innovations failed to progress beyond the stage of being formally adopted by schools (Fullan, 2006; Hargreaves, 2006; Sahlberg, 2006).

Fullan (2003) argues that education change is an ongoing and complex process, rather than an event. The once accepted idea of planning change and implementing it rationally in a linear way should be discredited because it doesn't take into account the specific contexts and conditions of the change. Due to the increasingly complex nature of the large-scale educational changes, which combine political, economic, and technological developments to change traditional cultural assumptions and educational practices, educational researchers and curriculum

scholars (Broadfoot, 1997; Carson, 2006; Fullan, 2003; Hargreaves, 2005) stress the need for a sophisticated understanding of the meaning of change in relation to particular political, cultural, and ethnic contexts.

Recent change literature has argued that attention should be given to teachers and the meaning of change for teachers in change (Hargreaves, 2005). Whether a change is successful or not ultimately depends on whether teachers have the capacity of translating the new ideas into pedagogical actions. In curriculum change, teachers' understanding and interpretation of new curricula is influenced by many factors, including the intensification of teachers' work (Apple, 1986), the deskilling of teachers (Apple & Teitelbaum, 1986), teachers' indifference and cynicism (Smyth, 1991), and ignorance of teachers' emotions and identities (Carson, 2006; Hargreaves, 1994). As teachers face increased expectations, responsibilities, and pressures from multiple sources – government, educational administration, parents, and students - they need to constantly negotiate within complex and uncertain situations in order to maintain a balanced well-being in changing contexts.

While the education change literature repeatedly reminds us that it is too naive and unrealistic to expect teachers to change their practice based on some prescribed curriculum implementation plan or strategies, there

has been little insight about the meaning change has in the lives of teachers and the intersubjective nature of teachers' knowing (Carson, 2009). Research in this area is particularly a matter of less concern because the paradigm of Chinese educational research is still dominated by positivist scientific logic, which mainly focuses on the external forces of change. It is not uncommon in China that research is often a theoretical review conducted in a top-down model and an inner communications channel between researchers and education administrators (Thogersen, 2002). Zheng & Cui (2001) criticize that many researchers in China generate their findings from literature review and statistics provided by educational administrative offices and they hardly provide any critical insights to the complexity of the current national curriculum reform.

The above literature review on education change, curriculum theories, and teacher education empower me to shift my interest and focus from curriculum implementation strategies to the meaning of curriculum reform for Chinese teachers. Such position shift, which will be further described, illuminates my research effort in understanding how the challenges and issues confronted in this current education reform are tied to the specific context and teachers' situations in China.

CHAPTER 2 LOCATING THE STUDY

Something awakens our interest – this is really what comes first!

H. G. GADAMER, 2001, P. 5

Introduction

My interest in interpreting the meaning of curriculum reform as lived by Chinese teachers is awakened by and grounded in my own educational experiences, the struggles and challenges I observed in curriculum implementation, and my desire of bringing out the living, full, ambiguous, multi-vocal character of teachers' experiences in a curriculum implementation process. This chapter depicts my autographical location for this study and the learning processes of identifying my research question and why this question fundamentally address teacher identity in relation to curriculum reform.

Reflecting my own experience of learning to teach and change, I realize that what curriculum reform means for teachers has not been well understood and investigated, neither in contemporary Western or Chinese change literature nor specifically in the Chinese educational context. Without a good understanding this fundamental question and the interwoven dynamics of teachers' learning and identity transformation in

large-scale curriculum reform, curriculum implementation and teacher development become fragmented and aimless activities. Therefore, this chapter illustrates the significance of my research question and how new understandings generated from this study should create innovative possibilities in curriculum implementation and teacher education in China.

Situating in Curriculum Change

Coping with curriculum change has been an ongoing effort throughout my teaching career in China since I became a teacher in the early 1990s. During the first several years of my teaching, the *教学大纲* (the teaching syllabi) and subject textbooks were the core curriculum materials used by all teachers. A commonly shared understanding of curriculum change held by teachers was that curriculum reform meant a change of textbook content. Many experienced teachers, based on my observation, didn't seem overly concerned about such changes because they viewed them as *穿新鞋走老路 (wearing new shoes to walk on the old path).* As a beginning teacher, content change was not my biggest challenge. What I believed I needed most were instructional skill sets and pedagogic tact in classroom management, which was not sufficiently

offered through my university teacher education training. During my first years as a school teacher, I learned instructional and class management skills through observing other teachers' classroom teaching and reflecting upon what my former teachers did that was enjoyable and workable when I was a student.

An autobiographic writing exercise for a graduate course, Curriculum Foundations, at the University of Alberta exposed me to the understanding that a formation of my teaching identity did not start from the first day I stepped into classroom as a beginning teacher. Instead, it started from my learning experience as a student in both the school system and at the university. Following teachers' instructions, finishing my homework on time, and getting good exam scores were the most important objectives I was expected to achieve when I was a student. I developed effective skills in meeting these expectations: making notes of the teachers' lectures, memorizing textbooks and notebook content, and doing drill sheets repeatedly. All of these skills were designed to make sure I was well prepared for the exams. Working with peers and active interaction in the classroom were not my concern as they were not emphasized by teachers and did not contribute to good exam scores. Teachers always had the full authority because they were the ones who

decided what to teach, how to teach, and what content should be covered in order to do well on the exams. Textbooks and syllabi were not only the most important teaching materials for teachers; they were also the focus of my learning because all tests and exams were based on them.

In 1999, I encountered the new curriculum reform when the *Basic Education Curriculum Reform Outline* was released by Ministry of Education in China. Because the school I worked for was one of the key schools in the province, it was selected as one of the experimental schools to pilot the new curriculum standards. To cope with demanded changes prescribed in the new curriculum, we, as staff members, were required to attend many professional development (PD) workshops provided by local curriculum consultants and university professors. Many of these sessions were organized in the form of lectures on why and how it was important to change the teaching and learning. Based on the new educational thoughts I learned from these workshops, I made some changes to my teaching, but I always felt these changes were additive and superficial. From the discussions I had with my colleagues, I learned they felt the same as well. The repertoire of resources that were available – articles and books on curriculum reform, a teacher's guide with new instructional strategies, and supplementary teaching resource and worksheets – did not

help me make transformative changes described in the new curriculum outline. I often felt trapped in the pressure of covering the textbook content, the tensions between demonstrating a teacher's authority and facilitating students' active learning, the constraints of the exam-based evaluation system, and the unclear boundary of being an expert or facilitator in students' learning. What relationships among the new curriculum, the students, and a teacher are appropriate and meaningful was a question lingering in my mind all the time.

I also tried different ways to accommodate students' diverse learning styles and needs; however, it was extremely difficult to work against the dominant teaching practices constructed from my previous educational experiences. Many questions tangled in my daily practice. What was meaningful learning and teaching? What should an appropriate pedagogical relationship look like in and outside of classroom? Would students really learned something if I didn't cover the textbook content? What were alternative ways to evaluate students' learning other than tests and exams? What were the meanings of inquiry and collaborative learning? And, how would I relate the new curriculum standards to my students and myself? These questions became situated in a discursive circle of self-doubt and self-blame: I am not a capable teacher because I can't

achieve all the objectives described in the new curriculum? I am not a good teacher because I lack the skills of translating the new curriculum into pedagogical actions? And, I was not alone in these situations as my colleagues shared the same frustration and ambiguities. These concerns, puzzles, and frustrations accumulated into my decision to study abroad as a way of finding answers to my questions.

Strengthening Capacity in Basic Education in Western China

Pursuing my graduate studies in Canada not only exposed me to a new educational system, living and learning environment, and diverse perspectives on education and pedagogy, but also led me into an international arena of teacher education. After finishing my graduate masters program at the University of Alberta in 2003, I was offered a job opportunity of working as the Education Program Officer for *Strengthening the Capacity in Basic Education in Western China (SCBEWC) Project*, which was a six-year, twelve-million dollar, international teacher development and distance education project co-sponsored by the Canadian and Chinese governments. The purpose of this project was to strengthen basic education through enhanced teacher education systems using distance education in selected poorer counties of western China.

This project was situated within a context within which Chinese governmental educational reform was a significant part of a national strategy for economic development. Since the mid-1980s, education has become the focus of major changes intended to decrease illiteracy, increase school resources, improve quality of curriculum and instruction, increase educational equity, and improve administrative efficiency and accountability. All of these objectives continue, according to new basic education curriculum reform agenda publicized by Chinese Ministry of Education, with the addition of new emphases on information technology and lifelong education (China Education Daily, Jan 15 2001). However, the commitment to expand education and increase resources to serve all people has difficult implications for the rural and less developed areas of Western China, wherein school facilities are often dilapidated and unsafe, teaching quality and quantity is inadequate, education resources are very limited, and student enrolment is low because families are too poor to pay school fees or spare children from farm work.

One of the major goals of the SCBEWC Project was to assist teachers in poor counties in Western China to implement the new national curriculum through developing and providing teacher development curriculum and opportunities on Student Centered Instruction (SCI), which is in line with

the new national curriculum requirements but points to a very different philosophical and pedagogical direction from the prior curriculum. The SCI teacher training materials and curriculum was jointly developed by a team consisting of both Chinese and Canadian teacher educators and consultants. The participatory SCI training sessions for Chinese and Chinese minority educators were designed and conducted in an approach of exemplifying teachers as learning facilitators and students as active, collaborative, and inquiry-based learners.

The Project adopted diverse strategies in facilitating new curriculum implementation and produced varying results at individual teacher and school levels. Through participatory training sessions, provision of professional development materials on student-centered instruction and leadership, onsite professional development workshops in school learning support centers (LSC), and regular follow-up support to classroom practice, many teachers from the project schools were exposed to the new educational philosophy and concepts advocated by the new curriculum before the mandated date of curriculum implementation. However, these teachers also faced challenges all the way through the training sessions, such as: unfamiliarity with the participatory learning style, the use of English translated into Mandarin and minority languages as the

instructional language in training sessions, many new and foreign concepts in the training materials, and the uncertainty in applying the new philosophical and pedagogical concepts with real situations. Like the new curriculum documents and standards, the overall concept of student-centered pedagogy seemed brand new to Chinese teachers in terms of its origin, content, and instruction. Many teachers who had the opportunities of participating in SCI training workshops organized by local Teacher Training Center indicated that the type of learning they experienced from these workshops challenged their prior versions of teaching and learning and motivated them to change towards the new ways of teaching advocated by the new curriculum. During the follow-up visits to schools and classrooms, I heard exciting stories shared by teachers and observed positive changes in classroom practices. I also heard pressures, challenges, and ambiguities shared by teachers and observed untactful classroom practices because of misunderstandings about SCI. The mixed experiences and feelings SCBEWC project school teachers experienced in learning SCI awakened my interest in studying teachers' lived experiences in this large-scale change initiative in China and in understanding what this curriculum reform means for Chinese teachers.

Coming to the Research Question

Coming to the research question of '**What does curriculum reform mean for Chinese teachers?**' has been a challenging and evolving process in this study. My initial research question, which was greatly influenced by conventional teacher development and education change efforts, was very much concerned with teacher development and curriculum implementation strategies. Having participated in and organized many *教研活动* (school-based professional development activities) during my teaching career, I naturally tended to interpret change as a linear and technical process. If teachers are given more resources and taught effective instructional strategies in the classroom, teachers would make changes happen in classrooms. After examining my own learning history and the diverse challenges experienced by the teachers during complex education change, I realize this is not the case. Teachers' change has something more to do with identity transformation, horizon expansion, and capacity for curriculum interpretation, than with simply mastering new educational concepts and applying new pedagogic skills in teaching practices. They need to expand possibilities of understanding the new curricula and make connection to the worlds in which they live and work.

Even though I have had close connections with this new curriculum reform from its very beginning and I have organized many teaching and research activities for my peer teachers, I found it extremely difficult to come up with creative pedagogies which can align my own teaching practices with the mandated change. I always found myself living within contradictory realities which were characterized by "the tensions between knowing and being, thought and action, theory and practice, knowledge and experience, the technical and the existential, the objective and the subjective" (Britzman, 2003, p. 26). During the Project work, again, I frequently heard about these tensions from teachers. Reflecting upon these experiences and tensions orients me to study the lived experiences of teachers in large-scale education change.

Inspired by Gadamer's (1989) call for questions which can open up possibilities, I shifted the orientation of this study towards hermeneutic inquiry. The arguments and presentations on interpretive curriculum methodologies in graduate classes and the regular mentoring I received from my supervisor during an independent study on hermeneutic inquiry fuelled my desire and capacity for locating my thoughts, feelings, reflective and interpretive experiences, desires, wishes, and hopes in a horizon of being and of understanding the fecundity of (im)possibilities in

curriculum change. Caputo (1987) argues that whether the world is best presented by metaphysical or anti-metaphysical interpretive frame, life is actually difficult. Therefore, one needs to restore life to its original difficulty in order to proceed. Enlightened by Gadamer's thoughts on hermeneutic inquiry and Caputo's emphasis on the original difficulty of life, I did not feel comfortable with the research question concerning curriculum implementation and teacher development strategies because the teachers' original difficulty of living through curriculum change was unclear to me.

Through this study, I intend to investigate the tensions, contradictions, and the complex dynamics in teachers' change and learning in this specific large-scale educational change context in China and give the original difficulty of teachers' lives in education change a voice. Such effort requires a historical understanding of Chinese education and teachers and an interpretation of the relationship between experiences and meanings. Interpreting these experiences and their meanings requires special attention to the role of language in the meaning-making endeavours. Such specific requirements on historical awareness, meaning interpretation, and the role of language further directed this study towards the philosophical tenets and practical approach of hermeneutic inquiry, which gives us a

new lens in understanding large-scale education change, the interpretive nature of curriculum implementation, and the dynamics of teacher's learning and change.

CHAPTER 3 CURRICULUM CHANGE IN A GLOBAL CONTEXT

Contemporary patterns of educational change present educators with changes that are multiple, complex and sometimes contradictory.

HARGREAVES, 2005, P. *x*

We teachers are motivated by identity needs the same as everyone else, and our pedagogical aims, strategies, tactics, and reflexes all in one way or another serve to maintain or enhance our identities.

BRACHER, 2006, P. 75

Introduction

The current mandated curriculum change in China, like any other large-scale educational change initiative, is very complex and closely related to its cultural and socio-political contexts. As discussed in Chapter One, Chinese teachers, whose identities are shaped by Chinese philosophical and exam-orientated educational traditions, are being greatly challenged by the massive and dramatic education change. Teachers are situated in tensions between unlearning and learning, and between being both, often simultaneously, learners and teachers.

In this chapter, the contemporary perspectives on curriculum implementation, the dynamics of teachers' learning, and the interpretive

nature of curriculum understanding are reviewed and constitute a fundamental rationale for this study to interpret the meanings of change from teachers' ontological positions. Such literature review indicates the importance of studying teachers' lived experiences in education change because their experiences inform us the core issues related to teachers' change.

Questioning the Technical Rationality in Curriculum Implementation

Curriculum implementation is an important concept in curriculum change as our understanding of how teachers implement curriculum indicates teachers' positions in the change process. Since the 1950s, new curriculum implementation in many countries has implicitly and explicitly followed Tyler's (1949) rationale and steps which logically and rationally include: plan and decide the curriculum objectives; implement the curriculum; and evaluate the effectiveness of the curriculum. This current nation-wide curriculum change in China, clearly, reflects Tyler's rational and principals of curriculum implementation.

Carson (2006) argues that curriculum change according to Tyler's rationale is very problematic because it separates curriculum

implementation from curriculum planning. Curriculum implementation based on a scientific and technological thought/action framework becomes an *instrumental action* (Aoki, 1986/2005, p.112) and positions teachers as consumers of the program produced by curriculum experts. According to an instrumental rationale, the success of a planned change is evaluated based on the fidelity of teachers' use of the prescribed curriculum. The problems and conflicts in implementation are simply reduced to the inefficiency of instructional skills and strategies and can be managed through provision of trainings on new ideas and skills. Aoki (1986/2005) argues this instrumental view of implementation minimizes or neglects the interpretive activities a teacher is engaged in when he/she encounters curriculum and reduces teachers from being-as-human to being-as-thing.

Studies on educational change and curriculum implementation have shown that many large scale reforms with technical rationality failed because curriculum implementation did not pay enough attention to teachers' learning and experiences (Aoki, 1986/2005; Carson, 2006; Fullan, 2001; Hargreaves, 2005). This absence of teachers' lived experiences in studies of education change indicates a lack of understanding how curriculum implementation can be deeply responsive to and resonant with what teachers know, who teachers are, and who they can change into.

Currently, teachers' perspectives and lived experiences in large-scale change initiative is rarely studied in China (Li & Yin, 2003; Yu & Meng, 2002) nor in many other educational change contexts (Jeasik, 1998).

Aoki (1986/2005) critiques that the instrumentalism in curriculum implementation amounts to a crisis of Western reason, which leads to a fundamental contraction between teachers' commitment to technological progress and the improvement of personal and situational life. Addressing the question of how curriculum implementation should be understood, Aoki (1986/2005) suggests an alternative curriculum implementation as "situational praxis" (p. 116) – pedagogic actions done reflectively and reflection on what is being done in implementation. He stresses that the view of implementation as praxis values teachers' subjectivity in curriculum interpretation and requires an estrangement from the dichotomized view of theory and practice. In another world, rather than seeing theory as leading into practice, teachers and teacher educators need to see it as a reflective moment in praxis.

The underlying philosophy of the new Chinese curriculum policy reflects Aoki's view of curriculum implementation as praxis. However, the process of curriculum change reflects a fundamental instrumentalism. Teachers are provided the new curriculum standards, textbooks, training

in new theories and concepts, and then asked to implement them into classrooms. The space and opportunity of curriculum interpretation granted by the new curriculum policy presents a contradictory reality between curriculum implementation as situated praxis and curriculum implementation as instrumental process.

The contradictory versions of curriculum implementation in this current education change call for a voice of teachers' lived experiences in curriculum implementation. I believe understandings of curriculum implementation based on teachers' experiences will enable us to re-imagine the ways of facilitating teachers' transformative actions in curriculum change.

The Importance of Teacher Identity in Education Change

The new national curriculum demands a considerable amount of learning on teachers' part to actually achieve the demanded changes. Bracher (2006) argues that identity is a crucial factor in the motivation to learn and essential for the attainment of personal well-being. With respect to teacher learning, identity matters in important ways because what and how teachers learn is shaped by and situated in their identities (Britzman, 2003; Drake, Spillane & Hufferd, 2001; Honig, 2006; Spillane & Callahan,

2000).

The existing body of research (Bryk & Driscoll, 1988; McLaughlin & Talbert, 1993; Newman & Wehlage, 1995) indicates that teachers' learning depends on the degree of organizational arrangements and norms of the schools in which they work. In another words, teacher learning is situated in relation to one's biography, present circumstances, affective investments, and social context. Some organizational arrangements and social norms can create incentives and opportunities for teachers to learn and improve their practices, while others can constrain learning and change. In the contemporary educational context in China , the situation of Chinese teachers' learning is more complex than organizational arrangements and social norms, because the new national curriculum proposes dramatic shifts in all aspects of education and calls for fundamental changes in teaching, learning, curriculum understanding and practice, pedagogical relationships, and what it means to be a teacher and learner.

This change process is difficult and complex, not only because new curricula content and pedagogy represent a radical shift from what was learned and taught before, but also because an acceptance of the new curriculum requires teachers to change their identities formed through prior educational history, context, and practices. For Chinese teachers,

aligning their educational practices with the new curriculum standards means transforming their identities, which has been identified as the most difficult challenge in the change process (Zhong, 2006).

Bracher (2006) defines identity as 'the sense of oneself as a force that matters in the world' (p. 6) and stresses that identity is an important motivating force affects learning. He says that learning is motivated by the effort to maintain and enhance identity; therefore, a learner needs to feel that their identity is supported but not threatened in the learning process. With regards to teacher identity, other studies (Cooper and Olson 1996; Smith, 1996; Spillane & Callahan, 2000) note that teacher identity implies teachers' sense of self, their motivation, knowledge and beliefs, dispositions, interests, and orientation towards work and change. These studies confirm that teacher identity is continually being informed, formed, and reformed as individuals develop over time.

Most studies on identity or teacher identity are conducted in Western context, where the teacher-self is individualized (Smith, 1996; Zembylas, 2003). Although teaching identity is becoming an emerging concept in education field in China, understanding of teacher identity is not fully appreciated and well developed. Based on my personal experiences and observation of other teachers, I believe Chinese teachers' sense of self and

subjectivity in teaching is neglected and suppressed in favour of the culture of collectivism and standardization, harmonious social and collegial relationships, and the respect to authority. Through reviewing Chinese literature on this current curriculum reform, I notice that the topic on why and how teachers should align their 角色 (role) with the expectations of the new curriculum is frequently discussed in books, articles, and teacher education and training programs.

Britzman (1994) argues that it is problematic when teacher identity is neglected or viewed as synonymous with the teacher's role and function because:

> *Role speaks to public function, whereas identity voices subjective investments and commitments. Role, or what one is supposed to do, and investments, or what one believes and thinks, are often at odds. The two are in dialogic relation and it is this tension that makes for the "lived experiences" and the social practices of teachers. (p. 59)*

Chinese teachers who are going through this current large-scale curriculum change need to negotiate and reform their teaching identities which are shaped by their prior educational experiences and their situated contexts. This transforming process brings great challenges and difficulties for Chinese teachers and calls for deeper understandings of how teacher identity motivates or constrains teachers' learning and change.

For teachers, it is equally important to understand their identities because such understanding signifies believes, desires, and assumptions underpinning their teaching philosophy and practices. Britzman (1994) stresses that if a teacher consciously addresses the identity question he or she can enhance his or her capacity for theorizing critically about the vulnerabilities and possibilities of his/her conditions and educational practices. She argues that the subjective consciousness of the tensions and relationships related to identity formation and transformation fashions the ways teachers understand their perspectives, biases, histories, and constraints with respect to learning, teaching, and the meaning to be a teacher. By understanding the interwoven factors in teachers' identity formation and reformation, teachers can be empowered to take the contradictions in education change as learning moments.

Teacher identity is also identified as a powerful mediator in terms of teachers' interpretation of and responses to imposed curriculum change (Vulliamy et. al, 1997). Through understanding their identities, teachers will be able to appreciate the struggles and ambiguities as the original difficulty of living through change. In education change initiative, the historical and political contingency of teacher identity needs to be recognized and emphasized because they "are lived and imagined

through the discourse or knowledge we employ" (Britzman, 1994, p. 58) and "allow teachers a broader range of strategies to negotiate their relations with others and with themselves" (Zembylas, 2003, p. 107).

This study attends to teacher participants' identity formation and transformation process and aims to demonstrate how teachers' deep convictions, efforts, and desires can be a powerful indicator of who they are and who they want to become. Understanding teachers' experiences in change through the lens of teacher identity presents me a space to explore to what extent Chinese teachers could possibly form new identities in the exposure to different pedagogical, cultural, and philosophical contexts and how their self-understanding and self-consciousness of identity change can possibly increase their openness to and appreciation of difference, controversy, ambiguity, and risks.

Interpretation as Methodology and Pedagogy

While working for SCBEWC Project, I paid many visits to project schools and I had many opportunities to observe teachers' on-site learning and teaching in classrooms. These Chinese teachers live and work in different geographic areas in Western China and have various ethnical backgrounds, including Han, Hui, Uyger, Kazak, and Tibetan. During the

two-year visits to about 60 different schools in six different project counties, I observed a bumpy learning path about new curriculum and SCI. Teacher learners were actively engaged in the participatory training workshops, excited about the new teaching and learning styles they experienced and observed, and appreciated the professional development materials they received through distance education. During the stage of applying what they learned into practices, they received positive feedback from students, but also encountered tremendous tensions and pressures.

During the initial stage of the project training, the SCI training was facilitated by Canadian teacher educators. Thus, finding qualified professional interpreters for the training sessions became one of my job responsibilities. Having had learning and teaching experiences in both Chinese and Canadian education contexts, I often acted as an interpreter for the SCI training sessions. As the training interpreter, my core concern was to make sure the teachers had a proper understanding about the content, which took place in the medium of language. Meaning-making in these cases depended on my interpretation, which held the accountability of creating meaningful communication between teacher educators and teacher participants, between theoretical SCI and teachers' lived situations, and between familiar and unfamiliar knowledge, skills, and attributes.

Training interpretation was a very rewarding but challenging experience. It was rewarding because through training interpretation I was able to obtain a deeper understanding of the educational concepts I was not familiar with in past. I remembered there was a time that I was stuck with the interpretation of *metacognition* when the teacher trainer encouraged the learners to use metacognitive skills to reflect on the relevance of the learning and their teaching practice. I knew the Chinese word equivalent to this term but didn't fully understand its meaning. When a teacher questioned what metacognitive skills were, I had to first converse with the trainer for an explanation or clarification and then interpreted what I understood in the Chinese language. In these scenarios, interpretation was not simply a reproduction process, but a process of "highlighting" (Gadamer, 1989, p. 388) the important parts in the original words or text. Such scenarios happened frequently in training interpretation, particularly when teacher learners encountered the key educational concepts, such as *inquiry-based learning, collaborative learning, active learning, experiential learning, scaffolding, zone of proximal development, and formative and summative assessment*, which frequently emerge in both the new Chinese curriculum standards and the SCI training material.

Interpreting SCI concepts was also a very challenging task because it

required more than strong linguistic skills in both Chinese and English. On one hand, as an interpreter, I needed to recognize and convey the value of the alien character of the SCI text and its expression. On the other hand, I had to intentionally choose Chinese educational terms or phrases to elaborate the new concepts to make sure the new concepts and ideas to be understood into the context in which these Chinese teachers live. Thus, training interpretation became a "doubled hermeneutic process" (Gadamer 1989, p. 387) during which I had to first interpret the meanings of the new SCI content and terminologies for myself and then re-create the meanings in Mandarin Chinese for teacher learners. This process became even more complicated when two interpreters had to be present in the same session because of the diverse ethnic and linguistic backgrounds of the learners. In such situations interpretation was conducted in two levels: English to mandarin Chinese and then mandarin Chinese to a minority language, such as Tibetan, Uyger, and Kazak.

After interpreting for several SCI training sessions, my understanding about SCI was deepened through justifying and negotiating the meanings between what was taught by teacher educators and what was meant in Chinese context. Because interpretation requires a self-understanding as well as an understanding of others, all the partners of conversations –

trainers, learners, and interpreters – become familiar with the curricular otherness proposed by the new curriculum and SCI and yet also make their familiar self strange. In teachers' learning, interpretation plays a vital role in bridging the gap between the other and the self, theory and practice, text and situated contexts, and public knowledge and personal engagement. The tensions and contradictions in curriculum reform are precisely a reflection of these gaps. Reflecting upon my personal interpretive experiences, I believe interpretation is a critical pedagogy in transforming learning and teaching in curriculum change.

CHAPTER 4 HERMENEUTIC INQUIRY

Hence the human sciences are connected to modes of experience that lie outside science: with the experiences of philosophy, of art, and of history itself. These are all modes of experience in which a truth is communicated that cannot be verified by the methodological means proper to science.

H. G. GADAMER, 1992, P. XXII

Although hermeneutics as a theory evolves out of the German philosophical tradition, it is indeed possible to characterize the Chinese culture tradition as a hermeneutic one.

L. ZHANG, 1992, P. XIII

Introduction

I began my journey of encountering curriculum reform when I became a teacher in the early 1990s and curriculum change is not an unfamiliar phenomenon to me. I became used to the term *change* or *reform*, but what has (not) been changed and what change means to me has ever become a question during my teaching career in China. In a graduate course entitled *Curriculum Inquiry* offered at the University of Alberta, I was exposed to various issues and methodologies related to curriculum understanding and inquiry. I was quickly drawn to the tenets of hermeneutics because of its ontological and interpretive emphasis as well

as what I come to understand as the hermeneutic tendencies was embedded in Chinese cultural traditions (Zhang, 1992).

In contrast with a view of theory as "contemplation of eternal essences unalterable by their observer" (Ferraris, 1996, p. 1), hermeneutics is defined as the art and theory of understanding and interpretation of linguistic and non-linguistic expressions (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2005). Hermeneutics not only questions the limitation of positivist research approaches founded on modern empirical science by attending to the humanness of being in the world (Gadamer, 1989), but also "has important insights to offer in its understanding of the deeply intersubjective nature of human knowing and its determination to keep the book of life open for constant reading and rereading" (Smith, 2006, p. 115). With an emphasis on understanding and interpretation as opposed to explanation and verification, hermeneutic inquiry, I felt, would fulfill my needs of understanding what this massive curriculum reform means to teacher participants of this study. Besides the intentionality embedded in understanding the meaning of this reform as experienced personally and professionally by teachers, exploring the transformative possibilities in education change was also my central methodological concern in this study. Thus, hermeneutics became my choice in fulfilling my dual

inquiry-methodological tasks for this study as it is not only represents a dialogical process of understanding but also requires a commitment to this process through interpretation.

Hermeneutics has also brought me multifaceted challenges in this study. First, the change from an empirical research orientation into an interpretive orientation required me to invest a large amount of time and effort in studying the extensive literature of ancestral hermeneutic scholars and understanding both Chinese and Western hermeneutic traditions while expanding my perspectives of understanding curriculum and curriculum inquiry; Second, hermeneutics as an interpretive research approach developed within and shaped by Western philosophical traditions required me to have a good understanding of its developmental background and contexts which are very different from the Chinese interpretive traditions. Third, the hermeneutic nature of this study required me to invest much more time and practice than I originally anticipated in learning how to demonstrate the key features of hermeneutics in research planning, data collection and interpretation, and writing this dissertation.

Through reviewing the literature on the history of hermeneutics, its characteristics, and the various hermeneutic perspectives, I locate

philosophical hermeneutics combined with the key aspects of and radical hermeneutics as the inquiry approach of this study.

A Genealogical Review of Hermeneutic Inquiry

Hermeneutics as an interpretive methodology has a long history in professional and academic fields. The term *hermeneutic* is derived from the Greek verb *hermeneuein*, with its spectrum of meanings of "to express," "to explain," and "to translate" (Palmer, 1969, p. 33). In much of its history, hermeneutics is only defined as the theory of interpretation and dominated by the paradigm of textual interpretation oriented more towards the text as an object of interpretation than towards the interpretational process itself (Gallagher, 1992; Tu, 2005). Early modern understandings of hermeneutics have taken the text as the end in itself and positioned interpretation as a discovery of facts. According to Gallagher (1992), the aim of early hermeneutics was always to "move beyond the external accidents like education and background and thereby to move into the spirit of the author and the meaning of the text" (p.323). Hermeneutics was a methodology for interpreting the meanings contained within the text understood as an objective whole.

Modern hermeneutics steps further than simple interpretation of the

text. As practiced in the social sciences, modern hermeneutics attempts to reveal understanding through text interpretation and involves recognition of sameness, place, and belonging. In this process, both text and human life become simultaneously reproduced and transformed. Although hermeneutics developed from specific fields such as theology, philology, and law where interpretation of written texts was the central task, the art of interpretation in modern hermeneutics does not confine itself only to the interpretation of written texts. The text may be written and oral, or it may be a social phenomenon or event.

Hermeneutics contained application and immediacy as a dialogue ensued between the orator and the audience since its early history when the Greeks and early Christians utilized oral traditions to read scripture and poetry and to apply these readings to their own circumstances (Neumeier, 2004). Rather than being the object of interpretation, an oral reading was understood as an interpretation of *the objective reality* of the orator and the audience with immediate, regional application (Gallagher, 1992). Chladenius, a protestant theologian in the 1700s, referenced the hermeneutic project as "explication leading towards understanding" when he tried to answer the question of "what makes an interpretation authoritative?" through his attempts to explore the means of

interpretation (Smith, 2006).

Schleiermacher furthered the early methodological hermeneutics by positioning it as an art of understanding, of interpreting. He attempts to develop a general hermeneutics of understanding by subordinating "particular rules of *exegesis* and philology to the general problematic of understanding" (Ricoeur, 1981, p. 45). Schleiermacher understood the hermeneutic project as a methodological event that assists one in understanding both the originating contexts of texts and the authors of texts better than the authors understand them themselves. For Schleiermacher interpretation and understanding are closely interwoven and hermeneutics is the art of avoiding misunderstandings. Schleiermacher saw hermeneutics as the task of interpreting texts exactly, correctly, and adequately by using rules of interpretation; he viewed the act of understanding as the reconstruction of production. To him, the work of interpretation was profoundly creative as it attempted to 'suggest possible meanings and interpretations and show relations between things in new ways, rather than simply document or record them or play them off against each other in a kind of epistemological power play" (Smith, 2006, p. 107). His main contribution to hermeneutics was to revive the role of intuition in human understanding to be counter posed to the analytic

comparative studies that had underwritten interpretive work to that point. But his hermeneutic goal of achieving the exact understanding of particular texts without a historical worldview detached his theory as a methodology for the human sciences (Gadamer, 1989).

According to Gallagher (1992), Dilthey attempted to expand Schleiermacher's hermeneutic methodology of textual interpretation by developing a general theory of understanding as a methodology for the social sciences; however, he reduced life to textual expression by following too closely his teacher's textual preoccupation. To Dilthey, life could be read as a text. Interpretation became reduced to a correct reading of life in the same way that Schleiermacher reduced interpretation to a correct reading of a text. Nonetheless, Dilthey did expand the hermeneutic project by converting the methodological preoccupation of the natural sciences into a methodological preoccupation of the human sciences in which the science of the spirit was taken to mean explicating the historical relations that enable a specific human knowledge. According to Ricoeur (1981), Dilthey set the stage for moving the hermeneutic project from one of a concern with methodology and epistemology to an ontological project, from a *mode of knowing* to *a way of being*. His positioning of hermeneutics in a relationship with history set the stage for unfolding text forward from its

immanent meaning to the sort of world which it discovers and opens up.

Heidegger radicalized hermeneutics into an ontological concern in which an existential phenomenological analysis of human existence reflects back the essentially "existential-ontological characteristic of human beings" (Gallagher, 1992, p. 4). Heidegger's work involved recognition of the fore-structures that enable the human condition in its present form through explicating the very being referred to as *Dasein* – "the place where the question of being arises, the place of manifestation" (Ricoeur 1981, p. 54). According to Heidegger, hermeneutics is the project of surfacing one's present horizon of understanding and one's knowledge and experiences, and recognizing these as productive sources of understanding. Ricoeur (1981) notes that "understanding, in its primordial sense, is implicated in the relation with my situation, in the fundamental understanding of my position within being" (p. 55) and understanding ontologically is not about grasping a fact, rather it is about the apprehension of a possibility and our utmost potentialities. Heidegger positioned this horizon of understanding as both the productive grounds of interpretation as well as the limiting factor of human understanding.

Regarded as the last formal philosopher of hermeneutics of the modern period, Hans-Georg Gadamer furthered Heidegger's radical

hermeneutic project by releasing the possibilities of understanding from Heidegger's sense of the limiting nature of the horizon of understanding (Neumeier, 2004). Although he too accepted that understanding is both enabled, and yet encircled and rooted in one's consciousness of her/his own historical becoming and place, Gadamer (1989) suggests that limits to understanding can be transcended by the horizons that other cultures, individuals, social groups, and traditions both past and present bring to conversation. In conversation, the unfamiliarity of the other de-centers and makes somewhat observable one's own taken-for-granted values and beliefs. He states that hermeneutics is about letting "what is foreignated by the character of the written word or by the character of being distantiated by cultural or historical distances speak again" (p. 295). Gadamer thinks horizons can be narrowed or enlarged through a fusion of the horizons of two consciousnesses differently situated. Prejudice or prejudgment is a definitive requirement in the process of understanding and serves as the basis and starting condition for interpretation. For him, the method of hermeneutic inquiry cannot be separated from what is being inquired into because what is being investigated holds at least part of the answer to how it should be investigated. Hermeneutic situation is important because the object of our investigation is affected by our history

and tradition and it determines our historical horizon, from which we form our present horizon. Gadamer (1989) stresses "understanding is always the fusion of these horizons" (p.305) and to bring about this fusion in a regulated way is the central task of hermeneutics.

Many contemporary scholars have attempted to use Gadamerian hermeneutic principles to interpret different fields of endeavour, such as education (Gallagher, 1992), pedagogy and ecology (Jardine & Friesen,, 2000; Jardine, 2008), international relations (Shapcott, 2001), inter-religious dialogue (Pandikattu, 1999), comparative literary criticism between east and west (Zhang, 1992), Asian wisdom traditions (Huang, 1999), mathematics (Brown, 2001), medicine (Svenaeus, 2001), and globalization (Smith, 2006). With regards to the purpose of hermeneutic inquiry, Smith (2003) notes that the mission of a hermeneutic scholar is not to ponder the texts and arguments of hermeneutic tradition, but to understand more profoundly "what makes life life, what makes living living" (p. 105). Likewise, this study aims, not simply to provide solutions to the challenges and issues emerging from the unprecedented large-scale curriculum reform in China, but also to understand and uncover the complex meanings embedded in the integral change process in a hermeneutic sense. The new understandings will suggest new ways to

view the relationships between conditions and change and open up spaces and opportunities for teachers and teacher educators to reach a new horizon about traditions, curriculum, curriculum implementation, and identity transformation in developing thoughtful pedagogies and maintain their well-beings in the face of challenges and pressures caused by curriculum change.

Different Orientations of Hermeneutic Inquiry

Within the discipline of hermeneutics, different orientations have emerged and developed. These orientations have been classified by Shaun Gallagher (1992) as conservative, moderate, critical, and radical hermeneutics. Following an examination of these four orientations, I argue that philosophical hermeneutics combined with the key features of radical hermeneutics is most suited to this study.

Conservative hermeneutics

The conservative hermeneutic approach developed by Schleiermacher and Dilthey attempts to achieve faithfulness to tradition. It positions understanding as the accurate appropriation of the meanings inherent within a tradition irrespective of the distanciation that one historical epoch

imposes upon another. The most important principle of conservative hermeneutics is the concept of reproduction or reconstruction, which means "reconstructing the original meaning of a text, the original intention of an author" (Gallagher, 1992, p. 215). In educational contexts, reproduction signifies cultural reproduction, which refers to a process in which traditional ideas and values are passed on in educational experiences. However, educational experiences never faithfully transmit cultural meaning without any damage or distortion (Gallagher, 1992), which means the reproductive goal pursued by conservative hermeneutics can never be fulfilled in education experiences. Thus the reproductive interpretation advocated by conservative hermeneutics is "naively unreflective and ideological" and the "noncritical understanding simply continues, reiterates, and reproduces tradition, cultural values, ideology, and power structures" (Gallagher, 1992, p. 241). Notwithstanding its shortsightness and contradictions in theory and practice, the interpretive lens provided by conservative hermeneutics assists in recognizing past learning experiences; also, previous knowledge constitutes the necessary background knowledge which learners need to interpret unfamiliar information and actively construct meaning.

What conservative hermeneutics has to offer to this study is the need

to keep in mind that teachers' understandings of new curriculum are based upon their prior learning and professional experiences which is a schema for their meaning construction. This schema is their knowledge horizon in which teachers continuously make adjustments until the new curriculum and their present contexts fit and make sense. This implies first that understanding teachers' historical situations is important for understanding their present situations in curriculum reform. Second, there is a need to understand the conventional curriculum stance held in the Chinese education system, not to reproduce it, but for the construction of new understanding of the relevance and difference of the two curriculum paradigms. Third, it is not desirable or achievable to expect teachers faithfully to translate the original meanings of the new curriculum plan and standards into their pedagogical actions because many factors, such as teachers' situations, contexts, and subjectivity, will influence their interpretation of the curriculum plan.

Critical hermeneutics

Critical hermeneutics as explicated by Habermas (1971/1984), Friere (1970), Giroux (1981), and Apple (1982) attempts to critique the relations of power inherent in tradition, and to expose the institutionalized,

reproductive exploitations of persons and classes. Contrary to conservative hermeneutics, critical hermeneutics aims to move away from reproductive interpretation, which is viewed by critical hermeneutics as the unconscious and unreflective transmission of the authority and power structures of tradition. Gallagher (1992) comments that Critical hermeneutics attempts to "get to the objective truth behind the false consciousness of ideology" and requires a hermeneutical ability to "escape from the domination of repressive traditions" and to attain "an ideologically neutral, tradition-free, prejudice-free communication" (Gallagher, 1992, p. 240).

Critical hermeneutics advocates critical reflection as it can neutralize the language context of tradition as well as the extra-linguistic forces which distort interpretation and thus remove their ability to function as a prejudice (Gallagher, 1992). Within this hermeneutic tradition, educators attempt to neutralize their own educative processes through self-reflective methodologies in order to emancipate their pedagogical interpretations from authority structures. Gallagher (1992) cautions that critical hermeneutics falls short of its emancipative goal, noting the way in which transformation merely "substitutes one set of constraints for another as revolution substitutes one regime for another" (p. 262). Even in revolution

or consensus, the interpretation becomes fixed by a social consensus as truth and the question if consciousness can actually be unconstrained by the effects of tradition, power relations, and language still remains.

Looking from the perspective of critical hermeneutics, curriculum reform is gradual transformation rather than reproduction. Transformation takes place within the constraints of tradition, culture, and social structures which shape the current educational concepts and practices. In other words, Chinese education will continue to be characteristically Chinese, distinct from North American, European, and other educational systems. But over the long term, cultural and educational systems change because, despite their conservative nature, they are always in a process of transformation, even within limited contexts. The curriculum reform will pass on a Chinese understanding of curriculum, but this understanding will not be the same from one time to another, similarly for teachers' perceptions of teaching and learning. Empowering teachers in forming new ways of teaching and learning is to be the central concern in curriculum reform, according to critical hermeneutic theorists.

The influence that a critical hermeneutic has on this study is to have an awareness of the impact of traditions, culture, institutional and

organizational structure, and ideological powers on teachers. While I don't agree that teachers' interpretation of the new curricula in practice can be neutralized and completely free from traditions and culture through critical reflection, I value the importance of examining the extra-linguistic forces which possibly influence teachers' interpretation of the curricula as well as their interpretation of what this reform means to them.

Radical hermeneutics

Radical or deconstructive hermeneutics as discussed by Derrida (1981), Nietzsche (1967), Foucault (1980), Caputo (1987), and Gallagher (1992) is relevant to the concerns regarding subjectivity. This hermeneutic orientation utilizes deconstructive interpretation to displace grand narratives through a surfacing of their metaphysical underpinnings. Deconstruction was understood as a way of engaging in conversation with taken-for-granted, foreignated words to "make the words speak again and to rediscover the experience of being" (Gallagher, 1992, p. 23). A deconstructive reading of text itself enables the interpreter to discover the linguistic constraints under which the author operates. Radical hermeneutics settles on the indeterminacy of interpretation because it

recognizes that interpretive act cannot escape one's subjectivity and always privileges one meaning over many possible others. Unlike critical hermeneutics in which there is faith in the emancipative power of reflection, with radical hermeneutics there is no promise of emancipation and all versions of meaning remain contingent, historically located, and suspect.

Radical hermeneutics throws light on this study to conduct a deconstructive reading of what teachers have to say about their experiences in curriculum change in order to understand the meanings embedded in their words and expressions. In addition, a deconstructive reading of the *Basic Education Curriculum Reform Outline* and *Subject Curriculum Standards* with teachers offers possibilities for identifying in a deeper sense those foreignated words about teaching and learning and understand how these taken-for-granted terms have caused the struggles and difficulties in change process. Radical hermeneutic orientation reminds me as a researcher to engage sensitively in listening and hearing that which reverberates through the linguistic expressions and that which remains silent when attempting to understand teachers' situations. Deconstruction requires me to remain cautious of the actions and reactions that emerge when teachers talk about their efforts in learning to

change.

Radical hermeneutics allows for the possibility of audacious transformations of pedagogical practice within the existing structure of the education system. The approach to achieve this transformative change is to make learners actively interpret the text, rather than to copy strictly the originally prescribed one. This concept confirms my experiences of curriculum interpretation and the contemporary theory of curriculum understanding. As I have discussed in Chapter 2, teachers are also learners in the process of implementing the new curriculum. They are not only expected to be actively engagement in translating the new curriculum into practice, but also engaged in multifaceted psychic dynamics of identity transformation. The transformative emphasis of radical hermeneutics allows me to investigate how teachers' subjectivities enable or constrain their interpretation of the new curriculum. As the existing educational structure and curriculum administration has not been changed much, a deconstructive reading of teacher's remarks about their experiences in curriculum reform will demonstrate the dynamics and complexity involved in forming new curriculum understanding and transformative pedagogy.

Philosophical hermeneutics

Philosophical hermeneutics has become the most influential current of hermeneutics since Hans-Georg Gadamer published *Truth and Method* in 1960. It legitimates an essential space for educational interpretation, which seems particularly endangered in the increasingly narrow world of *scientifically based research* and data driven educational decision-making. Gadamer's philosophical critique of scientific technique applied without practical, political wisdom is a challenge for a wide range of educational policies that are dismissive of distinctions in disciplines as well as vast differences in personal and group social, historical, cultural, economic, and political power influencing educational theory and practice.

Compared with the foregoing three hermeneutic orientations, philosophical hermeneutics has made several major theoretical advances. First, according to Gadamer (1989), the task of hermeneutics is not to develop a procedure of understanding, but rather to clarify the interpretive conditions in which understanding takes place. Prejudice is the generative grounding upon which understanding occurs. Prejudice as an inescapable reality not only limits, but also structures, and makes interpretation possible. Understanding is reached within a fusion of

horizons, which means when we set ourselves into the horizon of another culture or author, we learn not only things about that other culture or author, but we also gain a fundamental insight into who we are. The conditions under which a fusion of horizons takes place include attention to these prejudices individuals bring to the interpretive event. These are beyond what we are able to see, however they constitute the horizon of a particular present. Gadamer (1989) states that

> The horizon of the present is continually in the process of being formed because we continually have to test all our prejudices. An important part of this testing occurs in encountering the past and in understanding the tradition from which we come. Hence the horizon of the present cannot be formed without the past. (p.306)

Second, philosophical hermeneutics has a different view towards hermeneutic circle, which is a central notion to hermeneutic understanding. The hermeneutic circle traditionally signified a methodological process or conditions of understanding, namely that coming to understand the meaning of the whole of a text and coming to understand its parts were always interdependent activities (Kinsella, 2005). In philosophical hermeneutics, "the circle of understanding is not a methodological circle, but describes and element of the ontological structure of understanding" (Gadamer, 1989, p. 293). In other words, the

circle metaphor primarily connotes the continuous and dialogical nature of understanding. The hermeneutic circle extends temporally, it never finalizes, and it underlies all of our understanding, thus it is universal.

Third, language assumes a significant importance in philosophical hermeneutics as it is "the medium in which substantive understanding and agreement takes place between two people (Gadamer, 1989, p. 384). He reminds us that:

> Every word causes the whole of the language to which it belongs to resonate and the whole world-view that underlies it to appear. Thus every word, as the event of a moment, carries with it the unsaid, to which it is related by responding and summoning. (p. 458)

Conversation is positioned as a play amongst subjectivities, and insight occurs as a result of a fusing of historically conditioned horizons. Tradition, language, culture, and personal subjectivity is both recognized as the fertile ground upon which conversation can occur, and as that which gets transformed through dialogue.

Fourth, emancipation or transformation is viewed as a process "within educational experiences, rather than the end result of critical reflection" (Gallagher, 1992, p. 272). Historicity places constraints on reflection and total emancipation is neither possible nor desirable. Gallagher (1992) terms this recognition of incomplete emancipation as the

desirable state of "emancipation of participation" (p. 273).

In the context of this study, philosophical hermeneutics invites sensitivity to words such as curriculum implementation, standards, evaluation, development, resistance and a variety of other unifying but foreignated terms on teaching and learning. It also throws lights on expanding our current understanding of education change through attending to the specific Chinese historical and cultural traditions reflected in education.

Based on examining the four currents in hermeneutics, I chose a combination of philosophical and radical hermeneutics as the inquiry approach in order to fulfill the dual methodological task of this study – understanding the meaning of curriculum reform and transforming education practice through interpretation. The reasons are twofold:

First, radical hermeneutics' emphasis on deconstructive reading of the text allows me to engage sensitively in listening and hearing what is said and what remains silent in conversations about teacher participants' lived experiences in curriculum change. In addition, radical hermeneutics advocates transforming educational practices within existing educational structure and system through actively interpreting the new curriculum. This approach confirms my idea that interpretation is both

methodological and pedagogical, as I have reflected and discussed in Chapter Three.

Second, the history and context wherein this current curriculum reform happens is an important factor in Chinese teachers' understanding and interpretation of the new curriculum. Philosophical hermeneutics recognizes historical and cultural contexts as the interpretive conditions in which understanding takes place. The continuous and dialogical nature of understanding connoted in the concept of hermeneutic circle signifies the opportunity for both teacher participants and me to expand our horizons about teacher change and curriculum implementation through this study. Philosophical hermeneutics' sensitivity to language enriches the opportunities of understanding teachers' lived experiences through a careful and tactful attention to the words used by teacher participants.

Conversation is chosen as the research mode of this study because it "takes on the shape of the hermeneutic circle" (Gallagher, 1992, p. 311) and its promise of bringing forth the said and unsaid meanings of this curriculum reform.

Conversation as the Research Mode

To understand the meaning of curriculum reform for teachers I adopt

conversation as the research mode of this study because it has long been recognized as a research method for collecting, analyzing, and making meanings of data (Carson, 1986; Fetterman, 1989; Josselson & Lieblich, 2001). Conversation is characterized as a dialectic dialogue process of question and answer, giving and taking, talking at cross-purposes, seeing each other's point through working out the common meaning (Gadamer, 1989). This inherent nature of conversation indicates that conversation is more a hermeneutic reflection with shared understanding than just an effective technique for data gathering (Carson, 1986, Feldman, 1999). Feldman (1999) argues that conversation can serve as a research methodology in which the sharing of knowledge and the growth of understanding occurs through the meaning making process.

In this study, conversations are not only "a process of coming to an understanding" (Gadamer, 1989, p. 385), but also an "oral inquiry process" (Feldman, 1999) towards the meaning of curriculum reform in China. To have an in-depth understanding of teachers' lived experiences in curriculum reform and what curriculum change means to them, I invited six teachers from urban and rural schools in Western China to participant in this study. These six teachers were exposed to the new national curriculum at different stages. Some of them received SCI training

through Canada-China SCBEWC project and were prepared for the new curriculum implementation. Some of them did not receive much information and training about the new curriculum before and during new curriculum implementation. In this study, I do not intend to use this group of six teachers to represent more than ten million school teachers in China because it is not possible or desirable. Because China is a geographically large country and the social, cultural, economic, and school contexts are tremendously diverse in different regions, the school contexts in which these six teacher participants are situated rather represents the educational context in Western China than Eastern China, where the economic development is much more advanced and educational resources are comparatively abundant. As that has been said, the mixed levels of understanding of and learning about the new curriculum amongst these six teachers to some degree indicate a typical situation of teachers' engagement with the new curriculum throughout the country.

The interpretative feature of this study is inherently conversational in that both teacher participants and I as the researcher seek to deepen our understanding of the topic of and through conversations. From this point of view, conversations conducted in this study are not merely

methodological, but constitute what Aoki (1992/2005) has termed a hermeneutic returning to the lived ground of human experience that allows us to understand how sufficiently we inhabit where we already are as educators.

As all these six teacher participants face a collective task of translating the new national curriculum into pedagogical actions, the conversational mode of this study offers a unique opportunity for them and me to understand what this dramatic curriculum reform means and how to fulfill this task through "a community of co-operative investigation" (Carson, 1986, p. 83). This study is a collective interpretive endeavour in which we all followed specific theoretically grounded procedures and prepared carefully each conversation. Both participants and I in conversation tried to avoid obscurity of expression and ambiguity and endeavoured to be informative and relevant. It was made clear at the beginning of this study that we were neither in competitive positions nor attempting to convince others that one person's thinking was true, right, or better; rather it was a process of mingling with other ideas and being a great respecter of differences (Buchmann, 1983; Feldman, 1999).

Seeking to advance understanding and teachers' well- being through a discovery of other peoples' standpoint and horizon is the nature of the

hermeneutic conversations in this study. This requires the teacher participants and I to understand a horizon that is not our own and open ourselves to the full power of what the "other" is saying. We are bound together by the common subject – basic education curriculum reform in China – and we share a common desire to understand what the phenomenon of living through curriculum reform means for them. As participants of this study, we all brought prejudices (or pre-judgments) about curriculum change from the past and traditions and we would continually test all our prejudices to form and re-form what to take into the future. Through this study, we reached a "fusion of horizons" (Gadamer, 1989) on curriculum reform through valuing, examining, and transcending the current lived experiences without being explicitly distinguished from the past.

The nature of conversation implies that there are certain expectations in this study about everyone's role, about what is allowed and what behaviour is not acceptable. For example, in a conversation, I, the researcher, am allowed to talk about my personal self as a way to share my own experiences as a teacher having had experiences in curriculum change. I made these points clear during the initial meetings with each teacher. My prior discussions with Chinese teachers on curriculum change

and close readings on conducting research conversations developed my awareness and skills in maintaining the openness of conversations. In conducting the conversations for this study, I challenged myself to bring contradictions to participants' attention (Tupper, 2005) in the conversations in order to bring forth thoughts and ideas not hitherto present. In addition, thoughtful choices of words to converse with teachers were my first effort in keeping the conversation genuine and in maintaining inclusive, thoughtful, and respectful relationships with teacher participants. The actual conversations were far more complex and situational than I have expected and planned; however, I learned to appreciate the essential difficulty of conducting this study and increased my awareness of ethical considerations in doing research in cross-cultural settings.

CHAPTER 5 INVITING TEACHERS INTO CONVERSATIONS

Is it not delightful to have friends coming from distant quarters?

CONFUCIUS, THE ANALECTS

Although our three conversations lasted no more than six hours, it has been an eye-opening and productive learning opportunity for me. Being exposed to this type of research method for the first time, I have realized that raising proper questions is more important than solving problems. This study stimulates me to reflect my work critically.

ZHAO LAOSHI, 2007

Research Journey to Western China

The delightfulness described in Confucius sayings reflects the atmosphere and nature of my first dinner meeting with friends, former colleagues, and teacher participants in the research site in Western China. As I noted in a prior chapter, I chose this particulary city in Western China as the research site because it was one of two counties in this province that was involved into the Canada-China Strengthening Capacity in Basic Education in Western China (SCBEWC) Project. This city has a population of 49,000 and 44.8% of its population is Hui, a minority ethnic group practicing Islam, but speaking Mandarin. It is a relatively dry, desert-like

rural region and 80% of its population is farmers. The trip to this city from Edmonton, Canada was long and complicated: 18 hours in the air plus 8 hours on ground by taxi and bus, excluding the waiting time at airports and bus stations.

There are several reasons for me to choose this research site. First of all, this city has been actively involved in several large national and international education projects, including the Ministry of Education Distance Education Project, UNESCO Distance Education Project, and Canada International Development Agency (CIDA) SCBEWC Project. As well, the local Educational Bureau invests a great amount of resources and effort in assisting curriculum change at school level. The Teacher Training Center in this city is well structured and has always been very active and supportive in providing teachers with professional development and research opportunities. One third of the urban and rural schools in this city are CIDA project schools and involved in school-based structured training regarding student-center pedagogy. While working at CIDA project office in China, I paid many visits to this city and its project schools and established close working relationships and personal rapport with the educational leaders, teacher trainers, and some teachers from this county. I felt confident that they would support this research and be able

to help me invite teacher participants into the study at the initial planning stage of this study.

Second, school situations and conditions in this area are tremendously diverse because of financial and geographical reasons. Some urban schools have very good infrastructure, facilities, resources, and teachers normally have fairly good qualifications. There are also many rural schools in mountain areas and the school facilities and resources are very limited. A large number of teachers in these schools didn't receive any formal pre-service or in-service teacher education and training.

Third, local school teachers were exposed to the new national curriculum at different levels. Teachers from CIDA project schools started learning about the new national curriculum and piloted it in their classrooms one to two years earlier than the actual mandated implementation date for the new curriculum. Many teachers from non-project schools did not receive much information and training about the new curriculum until they had to use them.

As I discussed in prior chapter, it is neither my intent to use this group of six teachers to represent all Chinese teachers' experiences and situations nor my desire to use this specific educational context to represent the ones across China. My aim in this study is to use this specific research site and

sample of teacher participants to demonstrate why the meaning of curriculum reform is a fundamental question in education change, and how the meanings can be interpreted, understood, and utilized to expand our current understandings of teachers' experiences in education change and open up new possibilities in teacher education and large-scale curriculum implementation.

Inviting Teacher Participants

After the University research ethics approval was granted, I contacted an educational administrator I worked with in Canada-China SCBEWC project. I explained the study on curriculum change in China that I was undertaking as part of my doctoral program and I was interested in inviting some teachers from this county to participate in my research. I discussed with him about my research questions and the purpose of meeting with teachers to find out their experiences in the change. In his position as the Director of Teacher Training Center, he was responsible for the organization and provision of research and professional development activities to assist the teachers and principals in their task of implementing the new national curriculum.

This director was very supportive of my research and told me through

email and telephone conversations that this study was very important local teacher educators because they understanding teachers' experiences better would help them develop more appropriate professional development programs. He indicated that this study would also be a good opportunity for participating teachers to enhance their research knowledge and skills, which was one of the county's professional development program goals. He asked me to send him some information on the criteria of participant selection in order to find the teachers appropriate for this study.

I proposed some teacher participant selection criteria, one of which was to invite a group of teachers with mixed personal and professional backgrounds based on school contexts, subject areas, grade levels, gender, age, and ethnicity. The selection criteria were provided to him to contact teacher participants. Based on our communications, I planned to conduct the conversations with these teacher participants in summer because their professional development opportunities had been arranged in summer vacation. I was hoping that conversations with them while they were engaged in their professional learning would evoke more reflections and thoughts on curriculum change. The second reason was that I anticipated it would be very difficult to schedule quality meeting time with them

during their regular working days because of their busy teaching schedule. I provided this Director with the Invitation/Consent Letter (see Appendix A), in which teacher participants were informed of the research purpose, data collection methods, their right not to participate, and possible benefits of their participation of this study.

Two weeks later this Director informed me that six teachers had agreed to participate in this study because they would be available to participate in this study in summer. I very much appreciated what he has done for me as the group of teachers he invited represented a reasonable diverse background in terms of their school contexts, subject areas, grade levels, gender, age, and ethnicity. Their background information is shown in the following table:

Teacher	Gender	Age	Ethnicity	School	Discipline	Grade
Zhang	Male	30s	Han	Rural	Chinese Language Arts	11
Sun	Female	50s	Han	Rural	Science	6
Shi	Male	30s	Han	Rural	English\ School Principal	4/5/6
Wan	Male	30s	Hui	Urban	Math	7
Zhao	Female	20s	Han	Rural	Math	3
Fu	Male	30s	Han	Urban	Chinese Language Arts	8

After finalizing the dates to meet with these teachers, I booked my air

tickets to China and secured a hotel room in this county. Although I traveled to this city many times in the past years, this research trip gave me a sense of adventure I had never experienced before. In the past I had visited this county as a CIDA program officer and all ground transportation was arranged and provided beforehand. This time I was a researcher on my own and had to find out how to take a bus to Yuan Zhou from the bus station in the provincial capital city. On the way during the five-hour bus drive to my destination county, the Director called and told me that he and the six teachers were waiting for me to have a dinner meeting together in the hotel I was staying at. I was not surprised by but appreciated this late dinner invitation because this had always been the way of their showing hospitality to guests. In fact I was very grateful for this meeting arrangement because this would be a very important opportunity for me to begin to get to know the participants and establish some rapport with them before our actual research meetings.

I need to mention this initial dinner meeting because it reinforced my consciousness and sensitivity to the local context. Besides the six teachers at the dinner meeting, there were other people I have worked closely with in the past years, including the Director of Yuan Zhou Education Bureau, Directors of Teacher Training Center, and some local teacher trainers. I

sensed the pressure and uneasiness of these teachers because it was their first time having meals with the leaders from the city educational bureau, which rarely happened in their situations. After the greetings and a brief explanation of my research purpose and plan during dinner, I found the opportunity to give them a brief introduction to my study and the research approach I had planned. I particularly confirmed the approaches I would use to ensure the confidentiality of these teachers' participation because I wanted to make sure they did not feel threatened to share their true feelings and thoughts with me about curriculum change because of my relationship with their leaders and supervisors. This is a very critical aspect I learnt from my past experiences because the typical top-down administrative approach in China could easily narrow or close teachers' spirit or interest in voicing their thoughts in conversations.

Engaging in Conversations

All the conversations were conducted in Mandarin in my hotel room, which had a separated meeting space. At the beginning of the first conversation with each teacher, I further explained the detailed nature of the research and what was required regarding their participation and responded to their questions about the research. Teachers again were

informed of their right to opt out at any time during the research without penalty and harm. It was clearly explained to them that the forthcoming conversations would be systematic and critical research mode but not simply chit-chat. Each participant was invited to take part in three audio-taped conversations and each conversation lasted for one to one and a half hours. All three conversations with each participant were arranged at an interval of three to five days, during which I listened to the tapes, wrote down the emerging issues and thoughts, communicated with each participant through email or telephone about the key points we had shared, and adjusted the questions directing the next conversation. I kept a research journal with field notes and also encouraged the teacher participants to keep a journal recording their reflections and experiences of participating in this study.

Each conversation was a process of talking, listening, reflecting, and responding through questioning, anecdote-telling, and sharing. The sequence of conversations with each participant followed the following structure:

<u>First conversation:</u>

This initial conversation was an introduction to the research and my reasons for exploring the meaning of the curriculum reform via teacher's

lived experience. Participants and I shared our experiences, thoughts, and emotions about curriculum reform in order to become acquainted with each other.

Second conversation:

In this conversation, the participants and I discussed the cultural, historical, and philosophical connections and differences between the old and new national curriculum. We took the Basic Education Curriculum Reform Outline and Subject Curriculum standards as texts to examine what these connections and differences meant to them and how their past learning and teaching experiences interplayed in making sense of these connections and differences. The challenges and obstacles faced by teachers in making the change and the meaningful interventions helped them in their professional lives were also discussed.

Third conversation:

This conversation served as a critical reflection on the meaning of curriculum implementation, the assumptions made in the process of implementing the new curricula, and the influence of teachers' past experiences in translating the new curriculum. Teachers talked about the lessons they had learned on understanding the curriculum and translating it into pedagogical actions. During this conversation participants and I

discussed common issues we didn't discuss in the prior conversations as a way to extend our understandings about curriculum change into a deeper level.

To ensure the smooth flow of the conversation, I prepared some guiding questions for each conversation (see Appendix B) as a way of delving into the deep meaning of curriculum reform for teachers. The actual conduct of these conversations generated different questions and the unfolding life stories shared by participants actually lead to more extensive information than I had expected.

All data in this dissertation was reported anonymously and participants' privacy and confidentiality was protected through the use of pseudonyms. After this study is successfully completed, I will provide a research report to the county Educational Bureau as requested by the Director of the Teacher Training Center.

The Circle of Interpretation

The data analysis in this study was an ongoing interpretive process starting from conversations with teacher participants. Seeking meaning was the interpretive focus of this study and the meanings and understandings were generated from the conduct and transcripts of the

conversations with teacher participants and theme analysis of the conversations. The underpinning analytical and interpretive framework for data analysis is hermeneutic in applications, which interprets the situated meanings of teachers' words and expressions about their lived experiences in curriculum change. Analysis of the conversations attended to meanings and understandings generated from the speaking, listening, sharing, questioning, and reflecting process through this study.

All eighteen conversations with six teachers were transcribed in Mandarin. Based on the analysis of the transcribed conversations with each individual participant, the participants and researcher's research journals, what curriculum reform means for each teacher participant was identified and interpreted. The transcripts of three recorded conversations were given to the participants to confirm the accuracy of their views. Each teacher participant provided his/her corrections to the transcripts and supplementary comments about this study through emails in a later stage.

CHAPTER 6 THE MEANINGS OF CURRICULUM CHANGE

To understand the meaning is to understand it as the answer to a question. Questions always bring out the undetermined possibilities of a thing.

GADAMER, 1989

I am not resistant to foreign teaching rationale and practice, but I always consider it with Chinese traditions and context. The core educational philosophy reflected in the new curriculum resonates with the core ideas of Confucius education. Daoism has also shown us the direction of the change: everything follows its way.

FU LAO SHI, 2008

Introduction

In this chapter I present the conversational anecdotes collected in this study and interpret the meanings that curriculum reform has for these specific teacher participants thematically. By offering the selected excerpts of 18 conversations with six teachers, it is hoped that the reader gains a sense of these specific teachers' lived experiences in curriculum reform and how meanings of curriculum change for them can be interpreted and generated from these experiences.

Our conversations were carried forward by certain fundamental questions about the relationship between curriculum change and these six teachers' lives and practices. The meanings of curriculum reform were

interpreted in an ongoing fashion as we continued with each conversation building on the previous one. The themes displayed in this chapter were analyzed produced following the three conversations and ongoing interpretation with each participant. This thematic interpretation was made possible by analyzing the conversation transcripts in an ongoing fashion, reading these teachers' journals and emails, and listening to the recorded conversations many times. The interpretive notes I wrote down on the written transcriptions and my research journal helped me sort out the themes that emerged from the extensive information I collected.

However, it is important to note that these are not the only themes or even the most central themes. Rather, it is an attempt to demonstrate how teachers' experience in curriculum change can be understood hermeneutically and what this understanding has to do with teachers and those who work with teachers. In the process of reaching a new understanding on curriculum reform, I was conscious about working out a common language (Gadamer, 1989) which could be employed by both participants and me and one that would bind us to one another. This common language does not imply Mandarin that was used to conduct the conversations, but refers to the terms, expressions, and situations we all could relate to in the face of this curriculum reform. Understanding the

meaning of curriculum reform and reaching a new understanding about curriculum change was viewed as the essence of our conversations because:

> To reach an understanding in a dialogue is not merely a matter of putting oneself forward and successfully asserting one's own point of view, but being transformed into a communion in which we do not remain what we were.
>
> (Gadamer, 1989, p. 371)

I have attempted to contextualize the themes displayed here by introducing each teacher's background, which is important for this study because it outlines the hermeneutic situation (Gadamer, 1989, p. 301) each teacher locates her/himself within and that defines the standpoint of his/her horizon of curriculum change.

To protect participant's privacy and to show my respect for their participation and contributions to this study, I have used pseudo-surnames followed by a common Chinese title 老师 (pronounced *Laoshi*) for each of them. *Laoshi*, literally means *old master*, is a respectful term in China for a teacher or a person who is considered very knowledgeable and well-respected. A teacher is called *Laoshi* after his/her family name, such as *Wang Laoshi* in Chinese instead of *Mr. Wang*. The teacher participants and I have used this term for each other in all

occasions during this research process. All participants' given family names are replaced by different but popular Chinese family names as another way to ensure the confidentiality.

Zhang Laoshi: I don't know how to teach anymore!

Zhang Laoshi's Background

Zhang is in his mid 30s and he graduated from the local teachers college with a three-year teaching diploma. He started his teaching career in a rural high school and has been teaching Chinese Language Arts in the same school for 10 years. The school is a comprehensive high school with students from Grade 7 to Grade 12. He's currently teaching a Grade 11 '尖子班' (*Jianzi Ban, top student class)*, a group of students selected according to their high school entrance exam scores. There is not much difference in terms of instruction but students in this class use different textbooks from the other classes. Because students in this class are very self-regulated and diligent, much of their learning is self-study in classroom.

Zhang is both a teacher and an administrator. In addition to teaching, Zhang is the Head of School Moral Education Office, and his mandate is to make sure the themes of citizenship education, ideological and political education, students' codes of conducts education, and learning on culture and traditions are integrated in all learning and extra-curricular activities. The school is one-hour drive away from the town center, where his wife and child live. He needs to stay at school late to supervise evening classes

but there's no public transportation between the school and county center in the late evening, so he lives in the school residence during weekdays and only spends weekends with his family in town.

Zhang is a quiet and very dedicated teacher. He seems a bit nervous and cautious during our first conversation but brings intense personal reflections on his experiences regarding the curriculum change. During our first conversation, we started with a brief introduction of my research purpose and the study's background and then exchanged our personal and professional backgrounds before coming to the topic of curriculum reform. The initial conversation was not so much in the fashion of a mutual exploration of the meaning of curriculum change but an understanding of the process in getting to know the new curriculum. I noticed that he became more comfortable and engaged in sharing his thoughts and experiences in the second and third experiences than he did in the first one.

He did not have an email account and could not receive my reflective notes on our first conversation before the second one. He was called back to school to have a meeting on the day we scheduled our second conversation and he was late for the meeting because of the bus schedule. Three conversations conducted within two weeks were recorded and the

following themes on the meaning of curriculum reform were analyzed and developed based on the transcripts and repetitive hearings of the recorded conversations.

Meanings of Curriculum Reform for Zhang Laoshi

Meaning 1: Feeling lost in curriculum change

The sense of loss emerged immediately as a theme in our first conversation. Speaking of his experience in curriculum change, Zhang said he was not clear about the demanded changes by the new curriculum. He first explained how he got to know the new curriculum, and he said:

> *The content and structure of the textbooks changed and they are very different from the former textbooks. The top disseminated books on curriculum reform to schools and we were required to take two tests on these books each year. I attended some training sessions about curriculum reform.*
>
> *(Zhang Laoshi, Conversation 1: 07-08-2007)*

He didn't feel prepared to change because all his preparation was from the two tests he had to write on the new curriculum. His sense of curriculum change came from his notice of the changes of the required textbooks. He felt forced to change because of the top-down approach in administering teacher training related to the new curriculum. His

resistance to curriculum implementation and lack of ownership in the new curriculum was clearly implied in the word *the top* he used repeatedly at the very beginning of our conversation. In Chinese, *the top* is a general term for officials with higher positions. The unconscious use of this word indicated that he knew the new curriculum and its accompanying reference books came from a higher authority, but he was not clear who initiated the curriculum reform and developed these reference books on the new curriculum. In Zhang's situation, the top could refer to Ministry of Education, Provincial Educational Department, local Educational Bureau, or the District Education Office. His ambiguity about what is expected to change in curriculum reform was enforced in next part of the conversation. Here is our exchange:

G: What changes you need to make according to the new curriculum?

Z: Hmmm…what on earth does the new curriculum ask me to change? It seems that it asks a teacher to change from being a 'Shepherd' to being the'Lead Sheep'.

G: Could you elaborate?

Z: If a teacher were a 'shepherd', it means he controls the students; the relationship (between teacher and student) is controlling and controlled; In this case, students are like the animals controlled by the human being (shepherd); If a teacher were a leading sheep, he would direct students' learning and give students space to learn by themselves; teachers and students are in a equal relationship.

(Zhang Laoshi and Researcher (G), Conversation 1: 07-08-2007)

His repetition of the question indicated the demanded changes were not clear to him. The metaphor he used on the changed roles of teachers implied teacher's identity and pedagogical relationship are the most striking issues for him. He emphasized and clarified his understanding of demanded changes on these two issues again in our second conversation.

G: Could you compare your current understanding about teaching comparing to the understanding you held before curriculum change?

Z: In the past, as a teacher I had the absolute authority in teaching and learning and I always felt superior to students. I needed to strictly control students to make sure they follow the learning objectives and content I planned. Since we adopted the new curriculum, I was 洗脑 (brainwashed) to get rid of these deeply-rooted ideas. I attended training workshops, self-studied materials on the new curriculum. I am striving to have an equal relationship with students, and hope they might accept my teaching easier.

G: Might? Does it mean you are not sure if students would accept the new way of teaching?

Z: I am not sure. I've been trying to change since we adopted the new curriculum three years ago, but changes are not obvious.

(Zhang Laoshi and Researcher (G), Conversation 2: 10-08-2007)

Zhang's unsettling sense of confusion in curriculum change was obvious in his remarks. This led to very little change in practice because of the loss in changing direction. His beliefs and perceptions on teaching and

learning are being compelled to change through certain training sessions and techniques, which he called being *洗脑*, the Chinese word for *brainwashing*. The use of this word implied that the new ideas and concepts were compelling to him with such a forceful impulsion that he used unconscious resistance as a way to balance himself while dwelling between the old and the new ways of teaching and education. His reflection on this experience helped him to understand where his resistance towards the new curriculum came from, and he said:

> *Accepting the new curriculum and the new rationales are very difficult because I've been teaching in the traditional way for a long time. It is difficult to make the change, (because) I don't have a good understanding of the new curriculum. I am trying to make some changes but both students and I felt changes only occurred at surface. We didn't know how to make it happen in a deeper sense. This is also why I didn't want to change.*
>
> *(Zhang Laoshi, Conversation 2: 10-08-2007)*

Like many other teachers, Zhang's teaching practice is constructed through the process of being a student, becoming a teacher, and being a teacher in a very traditional teacher-centered and exam-based educational environment. This type of teaching and learning has long been supported by the school structure and valued by the community. It is natural for teachers like him to follow preordained paths, especially when the

surrounding educational environment and structure has not been changed much.

I recalled the feeling of confusion and being overwhelmed when I was going through curriculum change as a school teacher. During the process of doing literature review for this research, the complexity of this reform in term of its scope and nature struck me greatly. For teachers like Zhang in Western China, where there were very limited resources and few professional development opportunities, the first task of facing the dramatic changes was to understand why they needed to change and what were the expected changes. The disconnection between the rationale of the new curriculum and the practice in reality enforced his resistance towards change.

Meaning 2: To become a teacher-learner evolves psychological and pedagogical struggles

Despite his resistance to the change, Zhang Laoshi indicated he was interested in learning new theories, subject content, and skills to meet the demands of the new curriculum. In addition to his teaching responsibilities, he started taking the role of a learner. However, it was not an easy process to become a teacher-learner, and he said:

Z: The new curriculum requires teachers to obtain teaching resources from different sources. I don't know how to use internet yet. I needed help from my colleagues, but I always have concerns.

G: What are your concerns?

Z: I am concerned about showing I am not as knowledgeable and capable as I should be. I become a learner. That is the problem. When (I) asked for help from other teachers, (I) was afraid that I would be looked down upon by my colleagues. As a teacher I always wanted to keep my dignity and authority and wouldn't want my colleagues to know that I was incapable of meeting these demands.

(Zhang Laoshi and Researcher (G), Conversation 2: 10-08-2007)

His concerns certainly made me realize the fact that taking the role of teacher-learner in curriculum reform should not be taken for granted. To become a learner from a teacher's position, Zhang had to step down from his superior position as a controlling teacher to an inferior position as a student, which indicates he has some work to do regarding what teaching and learning actually mean. The challenges for him have two facets. First, he had to work through a psychological process of adjusting to the dual identities which implies very different meanings for the same person. Second, his learning needs to be very active and initiative in order to apply what he learnt in practice. Both challenges imply contradictions and risks. Under the circumstances of being inexperienced in this type of learning during his prior learning and teaching process, Zhang struggled

between the need of learning new knowledge and skills and the unconscious strong adherence to his old perceptions on what it means to be a teacher and a student. To him, taking up the role of active learner is not only a pedagogical decision, but also a psychological decision requiring new understandings of teaching and learning. This decision-making process is both the starting and turning point in the process of making changes.

Despite his own concerns, Zhang felt encouraged by students' positive responses to the changes happened in classroom after trying some new skills. He found his change from a teacher to a learner actually gave students an opportunity to become very active and collaborative in the learning process.

> *Some students are more competent than teachers in using technologies. When I asked them to help me with the technologies, they were very excited and eager to teach me how to use them. This enabled me to see students' abilities which I had not realized before. For a long time we deprived students' rights of active learning by lecturing in the classes.*
>
> *(Zhang Laoshi, Conversation 2: 10-08-2007)*

Students' reactions to his request for assistance in class made him realize the deficit of traditional instructional method and students' abilities suppressed under traditional education. This motivated him to

try more new strategies to evoke student's active learning through lesson planning, class instruction, and a more interactive pedagogical relationship. He became more conscious about giving students opportunities to try different learning styles in the classroom. Students' learning interests were enhanced and their creative ideas were evoked. He expressed his excitement in using teaching incidents to explain changes happening to students.

He acknowledged that there was so much to learn and he often lost his confidence in trying to evoke students' inquiries. Given the opportunities, students often raised some unexpected questions beyond his ability to provide answers. He didn't know how to respond to students in such circumstances because he was rarely challenged by students before. He said whenever he encountered such circumstances he would avoid giving students the opportunities to ask questions and purposely used lectures to cover the teaching content.

> *I often encountered students' questions I couldn't answer in the class. I felt ok to tell the students that I didn't know the answer but would do more research after class the first time; but I couldn't say I didn't know again a second or third time. It was embarrassing. This type of incidents happened a lot in my class at the beginning of using the new curriculum.*
>
> *(Zhang Laoshi, Conversation 2: 10-08-2007)*

His reflection implied he still believed it's a teacher's responsibility to provide all answers to student's questions. It also indicated he had to embark on a journey of learning diverse pedagogic skills in practice. Learning demanded by the new curriculum is multifaceted and there is no road map for this journey. The dual parallel tasks of teaching and learning created contradictory situations and required him to remain balanced in the middle of two forces.

Meaning 3: Experiencing ambivalence and constraints in negotiating a new professional identity

In Zhang's view, the new curriculum advocates an alternative paradigm of learning in which the focus is no longer on teaching, but rather on the learning and development of students. This fundamental change meant dramatic shifts in his work, such as: from primarily lecturing in classroom to facilitating students' learning; from transmitting knowledge to developing students' multiple abilities; from focusing on education results to paying greater attention to education process than to results. These demanded changes caused ambivalence and anxiety in his practice.

Z: I tried to give students opportunities to share their solutions of the problem in my class, but I still hoped they would follow my directions most

of time (embarrassed smile). I understand students should have opportunities to develop their creative thinking and problem-solving abilities and be encouraged to think from different perspectives, but in cockles of my heart, I still think it is efficient to give students one standard answer and ask them to memorize it. The traditional ways are more effective in terms of classroom management and exam results. Sometimes the classroom seems more interactive and engaging, but what students had learnt was very limited and they couldn't master the content I covered in my instruction. It's very controversial and I don't know what to do.

G: Maybe because the activities are not appropriate for the objectives of the lesson. It needs time and practice to figure out what strategies work for your class and for each lesson.

Z: That's the problem. I've only learned theories about teaching and learning, but don't know how to reflect them in practice. Trainers only lectured on some theories and deficiencies of traditional teaching and learning; they didn't actually know what to do in practice themselves. So after the training everything is the same.

(Zhang Laoshi and Researcher (G), Conversation 2: 10-08-2007)

In his struggles to change the way he taught, his conceptions of teaching and learning seemed to remain the same. For him, new instructional strategies are only tools to enhance the interactivity in the classroom, but disconnected from his understanding of good teaching and learning. To him, efficiently transmitting the textbook content to students means good teaching; mastering the lecture content in an accurate and efficient way is good learning. How a teacher should teach described in the new curriculum is very distant from his own sense of good teaching

and learning. He felt displaced and threatened by the identity crisis he experienced in this change process. One reason he identified as contributing to this identity crisis was the inadequacy of the training sessions in terms of its content and delivery methods.

Having been situated in the old teaching paradigm all his prior learning and professional life, he needed more guidance than explanation of those new educational theories in order to make change sustainable. I recalled when I worked in SCBEWC Project, the learning resources demanded by most teachers were video clips demonstrating student-centered pedagogy. To have a sense of what good teaching and learning mean in practice, they needed to see how it worked in large classes and local situations. But quite often, these needs were not satisfied.

Insecurity was claimed as another obstacle of identity change for Zhang. On one hand, he realized the necessity of establishing a more democratic pedagogical relationship; on the other hand, he's afraid of losing students' respect if he gave up his control of students. The feelings of ambivalence and insecurity sounded the most important factors hindering his initiation in curriculum reform.

Meaning 4: Feeling depressed from not being able to keep up with high social expectations

Zhang expressed his frustration about the huge gap between society's high expectations towards teachers and teachers' actual capability of meeting these expectations. Teachers are human beings, and he emphasized this point several times during our conversations. To elaborate his feeling of helplessness, he told me an accident happened in his school not long ago. One teacher, who had long been recognized as an outstanding teacher in his school, was suspended from teaching because a student was diagnosed with a sickness after being physically punished by the outstanding teacher. Zhang was certain that it was wrong for that teacher to use corporal punishment, but felt ironic and acceptable that this same person suddenly had two totally different reputations because of this incident, and he said:

> *Yesterday she was a role model and admired by everyone, but suddenly she became a person disregarded by everyone. This is so ironic. She is still the same person, but the issue is what measures used to judge teachers. A teacher is called the "engineer of human soul". This metaphor was not a blessing, but a condemnation. I don't think I am an "engineer of the human soul" because it implies the expectations I will never be able to reach.*
>
> *(Zhang Laoshi, Conversation 2: 10-08-2007)*

Zhang's comments surprised me as this was the first time I heard a teacher expressing such strong resentment towards this metaphor.

Engineer of human soul, a metaphor used by Joseph Stalin, the former Communist Party Leader of Soviet Union, in a favourable sense towards writers, is used extensively in China to refer to the nobility of the teaching profession. But this metaphor was definitely not appreciated by Zhang. The strong negative sense expressed in his comments indicating this metaphor had become a control, an indicator of denying teachers' personal and social needs. I knew that many teachers didn't perceive this phrase as a favourable adjective for teaching profession as it was before, but I didn't realize a metaphor can be such a depressing discourse for teachers like Zhang. It was a hidden discourse we do not hear often in public, but it certainly indicates the authentic voices silenced in curriculum change and matters that need attention in curriculum implementation.

Meaning 5: Feeling controlled by the National University Entrance Exam

The most important educational event today for Zhang and his students in senior high school is the national entrance examination that determines student entrance to a university. Talking about the barriers and challenges in adopting the new curriculum, Zhang claimed that the National University Entrance Exam was the biggest challenge for him as he tried to

adopt the new curriculum because the Examinations are the most powerful force in forming and directing teaching, learning, and school development. The National University Entrance Examination results are the key standards used, not only to rank students' admissions to university, but also to evaluate teachers and schools. Under this arrangement the university enrolment rate has become the key focus of school leaders, teachers, students and parents. In western China where resources are extremely limited and more than half of its population lives in poverty, success in the entrance exams is seen as a direct pathway to a life out of poverty with secure job and salary. Zhang openly shared his view on his current practice and the National University Entrance Exam.

Z: For me, the ultimate teaching objective is to improve students' exam marks. I am teaching Grade 10 now and will teach them till they finish grade 12. My goal is to improve student's (National Entrance) Exam scores.

G: So your teaching is to prepare students for the national entrance exam since they are in Grade 10, right?

Z: Yes. Most teachers are like me. We teach the same way as we did before.

G: But you've made some changes in practice. What motivated you to change?

Z: Whenever I gave students opportunities to participate in new learning activities or do new assignments, students always showed creative ideas which were out of my expectation and imagination. If there is no pressure

from the exam scores, I would like to give students more space and opportunity to develop their creative thinking and different capabilities. (But) now we are trapped in the exams and the biggest obstacle of changing our practice now is the national university entrance examination. I am extremely concerned that students couldn't get good exam scores if they don't follow my instruction on the curriculum content. My ultimate goal of teaching now is to prepare students to get ready for the (national university entrance) exam.

(Zhang Laoshi and Researcher (G), Conversation 3: 13-08-2007)

To Zhang, the changes to his practice are totally directed by the National University Entrance Exam. He will only use those new curriculum and new instructional strategies if they lead to student success on these exams. In China, the National University Entrance Exams are still politically controlled and adopted by the Ministry of Education and the Provincial Educational Departments to exclude large student populations from limited university seats. Whether and how the National University Entrance Exam will be changed is an important factor for teachers like Zhang in their decisions of making changes in educational practices.

Sun Laoshi: I become an unqualified teacher

Sun Laoshi's Background

Sun is a middle-aged female teacher with 25 years' teaching experience in elementary education. She became a teacher after graduating from high school and upgraded her teacher qualification through self-regulated study in university. She is currently the vice principal of a rural elementary school and teaches the new science subject emerged with the new national curriculum. Before teaching science, she taught *Nature,* which was changed and integrated into the new science curriculum. She had also taught Language Arts, Math, Music, and Physical Education throughout her teaching career.

Sun was a very enthusiastic and outgoing person, who impressed me with her eagerness to learn and straightforwardness during our conversations. I had always had the assumption that older teachers would not accept the new curriculum easily and they would likely have lots of complaints about the enormous learning they had to take on. However, this prejudgment had been challenged and changed through our three conversations. Sun showed her enthusiasm for embracing the change and her eagerness for learning everything she needs to become a good science

teacher. She was able to reveal her thoughts and reflections clearly and deeply in our conversations and the relationship between us became much closer as we engaged deeper in our conversations and experience mutual sharing process.

Sun was well prepared for each meeting. Prior to our sessions she would have read the summary of our conversation along with my notes and further questions for next meeting. She always provided more clarifications and additions to what she had originally said in the conversation. Much of her thinking and reflection on curriculum change was described through the descriptive incidents happening in her teaching and learning. Comparing with the transcripts of conversations with other teachers, the three conversations I had with Sun were the most detailed of the six individuals. The details made her experiences more vivid and meaningful; though it took me longer time to identity the themes from the descriptions and incidents.

The conversations with Sun were especially important for understanding the meaning of change for teachers in this study. Science, especially science education at elementary level, is a new subject in Chinese basic education. The national curriculum reform policy and science curriculum standards clearly addressed the importance of science

education for students' overall development; however, science education in schools is still a contested subject. Focusing on student's inquiry learning, problem solving skills, and subject connection with students' life experiences, the Science subject was charged with the goals of shifting knowledge/teacher centered education to process/student centered education.

The scope and nature of the change in this subject defined a huge learning task on the teacher's part. This emerged as an important topic in our conversations. In addition, the concrete examples Sun used as responses to my questions and clarification indicated that a science teacher was charged with very demanding tasks in learning new content knowledge and specific pedagogic skills, which were usually provided through formal pre-service teacher education programs. Unsettled by the challenges and contradictory realities, she is willing to take the risks in teaching a very demanding subject.

The interpretive analysis of the transcriptions revealed the following meanings from three conversations.

Meanings of Curriculum Reform for Sun Laoshi

Meaning 1: Becoming an unqualified teacher

While sharing her experiences in teaching science, Sun repeatedly mentioned the biggest challenge for her was that she didn't have sufficient disciplinary - subject matter - knowledge to teach Science. The deficiency of her discipline knowledge was a challenge for her in the past, but the new science curriculum standards intensified the challenges in practice.

> *I never received education and training on Science content. When I taught Nature, I was able to teach this subject because I just needed to follow the content and procedure on textbook and teachers' reference book. A teacher needs to have strong disciplinary background and good pedagogic content knowledge to teach the new science subject. To be frank, I am not capable of teaching Grade Five Science because of the deficiency of my disciplinary knowledge and instructional skills. One topic in the new science curriculum is Mechanics. It includes concepts of gravity, elasticity, and friction. This was part of junior high Physics curriculum in the past. I learned these concepts when I was in Junior high but forgot most of them.*
>
> *(Sun Laoshi, Conversation 1: 07-08-2007)*

Traditionally, the science curriculum in China was discipline-centered and the interconnectedness among physics, biology, chemistry, and the earth sciences was absent in both the curriculum and in the way it was taught. Scientific attitudes, values, processing skills and higher-order thinking skills were not emphasized. Science education only focused on one domain: knowledge transmission and acquisition. The new science curriculum expanded the objectives of science education and

requires learning to be developed in five areas, including up to date subject knowledge, inquiry skills in conducing scientific experiments, creative and critical thinking, abilities in applying science into real life, and positive attitudes towards science. For Sun, these demands imposed great pressures and challenges on her. The content change in science was more than simply upgrading old content. Science is a completely new subject beyond her capability and qualification.

S: I told the Principal that I was not qualified and capable of teaching Science.

G: What did the principal say?

S: He said if a teacher like me was not able to teach this subject, nobody else in our school would be able to teach it.

(Sun Laoshi and Researcher (G), Conversation 1: 07-08-2007)

In her principal's eyes, Sun is obviously an experienced and qualified teacher. Her contributions and teaching were highly recognized at the school. She had no other choice but taking over the responsibility of teaching this new subject, but her sense of disqualification was not released.

Meaning 2: Don't have substantive content knowledge to teach science

Sun used quite a few science topics as examples to explain the greatness of the challenge brought by the new science curriculum. In light of the examples she used in describing the new science subject, it was captured that new science curriculum covered a broad range of topics in botany, biology, physics, and chemistry.

According to the new curriculum standards, it is central for science teachers to understand the major concepts, assumptions, debates, processes of inquiry, and ways of knowing associated with modern science. The teacher is also expected to know that scientific knowledge is always changing and requires understanding how that knowledge is generated. Through describing the main topics included in the new science curriculum, Sun indicated she didn't have adequate knowledge of specific science topics, including water, air, life, earth, etc. Her academic background in science and science education was far from sufficient and this motivated her to take all possible opportunities to learn from books, students, parents, and colleagues.

> *Sometimes I learn new science knowledge from parents. I once led a discussion on the process from flower to fruit. Students asked me why some flowers turn into fruit but others do not. I explained the reasons but could not give students any example. So I encouraged students to ask their parents as they have more practical knowledge about plants. The next day students shared many different examples they learned from their parents.*

This never happened before when I strictly follow the teaching syllabus.

(Sun Laoshi, Conversation 1: 07-08-2007)

General understanding of science knowledge was also an outstanding issue for her. She was confused by many conceptual questions regarding science: Is knowledge still important for students? Is it important for students to know the right answers concerning science phenomena? What are the right answers to the science experiments in the textbook and should a teacher clarify answers after an inquiry activity? These became questions she pondered upon in her daily teaching.

I was told at the training that inquiry learning and problem solving skills were the main objectives of the science education so it was not important for students to know the correct answers of science experiments. But I disagree with this idea because students always wanted to know if they'd come up with the right answers through experiments. The new textbooks only present the materials and process of the science experiments but not results. Most times I don't know what answers are right. But I can't always tell students I don't know the answers. Subject content knowledge is very important for me.

(Sun Laoshi, Conversation 1: 07-08-2007)

The professional development sessions she participated in didn't answer her puzzles in practice but intensified her confusion. She needed badly to upgrade and enrich her academic background in science-related

disciplines, including physics, biology, chemistry, but this type of content was not provided by the training sessions. She viewed this as major disadvantage of the current professional development program for in-service teachers. She hoped to have opportunities to learn more science content to be able to teach science. She also realized that science teacher education program was absent in universities and this is not only a problem for current school teachers, but will also be big challenges for those students who will become teachers.

Meaning 3: Transforming pedagogy through personal learning and teaching

In addition to learning science content knowledge, Sun confirmed that pedagogic learning was another important task in her teaching practice. Inquiry learning advocated in the new science curriculum requires teachers to change their pedagogic practice dramatically. Teaching shouldn't be textbook-centered or knowledge focused, but focus on students' learning process and skills in scientific inquires. Comparing the traditional instructional method with the current practice, Sun indicated she had made positive changes in her teaching and attributed the pedagogic shifts in her practice to the training sessions she participated.

Sun: In the past, when I taught the topic of Carbon Dioxide, I first read students the introductory paragraph on new concepts, and then demonstrated the process of experiment; at the end I would ask students to finish the blank-filling exercises on the textbook. Students only needed to remember two points: first, carbon dioxide can extinguish fire; second, what is fire extinguisher. This is how I was taught when I was in school.

G: How do you teach now?

Sun: Now I would spend two or three hours in lesson planning and experiment preparation. Students are not only learning scientific knowledge, but also actively participating in doing scientific experiments. During the experimental process they often had more questions and interesting ideas. Now I think of students more in my lesson planning, particularly on how to evoke their curiosity and connect the content to their life experiences.

(Sun Laoshi and Researcher (G), Conversation 2: 10-08-2007)

Students had become important in her lesson planning and classroom instruction, which was absent in her former practice. Through creating opportunities for students to ask questions and explore the answers, she was able to see students' knowledge, skills, and capabilities suppressed by traditional teaching.

In the past my teaching focused on the textbook content. I didn't know students' experiences and background or ask them questions in class. Students didn't have the opportunity to show their learning and express themselves. Having received training in new curriculum, I started giving students opportunities to speak out in class. As a result, they often showed their abilities and knowledge I didn't know before.

(Sun Laoshi, Conversation 2: 10-08-2007)

Sun was delighted with the changes occurring in her class as students had shown more interests and initiatives in learning science. Students gradually demonstrated their creative thinking associated with their unique experiences. Those who were normally viewed as slow or trouble students in traditional class settings gained learning confidence and motivation from science education. The positive changes on students learning styles motivated Sun to learn more knowledge and skills in science teaching and better instructional skills. Meanwhile, she was able to reflect critically about her own attitude and identity change during this learning process.

Sun: the biggest requirement of the new curriculum is that teachers should become learners. (Teachers need to) learn not only from texts and materials, but also from teaching practice. We need to try, summarize, and then improve.

G: Did you feel any pressure from or uncomfortable of becoming a learner because you are the vice principal and an experienced teacher?

S: No. I didn't have much concern of losing my authority because I need to learn new knowledge and skills. I thought more about where to get help. I quite often learned from my colleagues in my schools, sometimes out of school.

G: What's your view of the changing process then?

S: Change is a long process, in which we have to learn, practice, and reflect. As a teacher, I feel the only way to meet the demands of curriculum change is to improve my professionalism through continuous learning.

(Sun Laoshi and Researcher (G),Conversation 2: 10-08-2007)

Meaning 4: Forming new understandings of textbook, curriculum, and their relationships with life experiences

In the past, the order and sequence of teaching were strictly prescribed in textbook and subject syllabus. Textbooks were the 'bible of teaching', according to which teaching and examinations were planned and conducted. Sun was excited talking about how she was able to use textbooks and teaching materials in a more flexible way so that the teaching was more appropriate for local situations. For her, this change meant a lot. It implies her changed view of textbook and curriculum and this changed practice makes perfect meaning for students and herself. She gave an example about the change on this aspect:

> *The topic of Plants is arranged to be taught in March according to the structure of the textbook. However, we usually have a late Spring and flowers and trees won't bud till April or May. So I adjusted the teaching order of the topics and taught the topic according to our local season. Before curriculum change, I always used textbooks strictly according to the order of its content and this was something I'd never done before.*
>
> ...
>
> *Through restructuring the order of the topics, I was able to connect the content more closely with student's life. This actually is a dialogical learning process between me and my students. For example, when we came across the topic of Food and Nutrition, most students designed a nutritious breakfast according to the food they learned from the textbook, such as a*

banana, a piece of sausage, and a glass of milk. This was not realistic because their family can't afford this. Many families even cannot afford an egg as breakfast for their child. I realized extreme helplessness in achieving some of the learning objectives defined in curriculum standards due to the poverty and reality of life.

(Sun Laoshi, Conversation 2: 10-08-2007)

As the above teaching moments imply, Sun's personal and professional life faced more than just learning new knowledge and skills. She was trying to make sense of the multi- meanings of pedagogy while being stuck in the mismatch between the national curriculum standards and the local context. This mismatch was not new to her and her students, but she had never experienced such feelings of empathy to her students and the powerlessness of poverty when her duty was simply transmitting the textbook content to students in the past. The new curriculum creates space for teachers to locate their teaching in local situations and this space generated not only new understanding of curriculum and pedagogy, but also new tensions and challenges. On one hand, this space enabled her to reflect and re-evaluate what it means to be a science teacher. On the other hand, the mismatch she experienced led her question the validity of the national curriculum standards and her attempts to understand why it was necessary and urgent to develop local or school-based curriculum.

Students become alive in her teaching. They are not the passive learners waiting for being fed with knowledge, but rather they become alive, curious, and thoughtful human beings. Students are always the focus when Sun commented on and described about curriculum change and she realized that this was an important shift she had made after adopting the new curriculum. She said:

> *In the past I didn't give enough attention to students, but now I am able to consider their backgrounds, interests, abilities, and feelings in lesson planning and classroom learning process. I also focused on developing their learning strategies and problem solving skills. Students' thinking is broader and more creative and they always have unexpected questions in class. They became more motivated and interested in learning whenever they had the opportunity to share ideas with teachers or provide questions teachers don't know. Teaching is becoming more flexible, interesting, and unpredictable.*
>
> *(Sun Laoshi, Conversation 2: 10-08-2007)*

Students' changes became Sun's changing catalyst and motivated her to learn and experiment in practice. Through trying and reflecting on what is working and what did not work, she became more confident in making differences in students' lives through science education. The new confidence she gained motivated her to connect with colleagues and communities to explore new learning opportunities for her and other teachers in school.

Meaning 5: Indwelling between science education-as-planned and science education-as-reality

In the Science curriculum standards, it was clearly elucidated that the objectives of science education were to teach students basic knowledge of the sciences as well as fundamental principles of scientific thinking and problem solving. The aim was to spark the interest of the students in the sciences and prevent them from disliking and rejecting the sciences. Through inquiry and dealing with scientific phenomena, students could form the foundation for a permanent interest in the sciences and understanding of the world that allows them to make informed decisions. Though the government and new curriculum policies clearly stated the importance of science education for the nation and the development of its citizens, the reality of science education in schools was discouraging. A group of Chinese science academicians expressed their great concerns on school science education in a letter to government:

> *In recent years science education was weakened in schools. …Instructional time of science was shortened and given to other school subjects. Teachers are not qualified to science teaching; research on science curriculum structure and standards was not conducted sufficiently before curriculum implementation; little effort and resource were devoted to teachers' learning. Teachers are confused and many of them were heading to wrong direction in their practice.*
>
> *(Wei, 2008)*

Sun experienced all the challenges summarized in above comments. Though she was not confident in her teaching qualifications, she indicated that she would not wait for all the resources and support to be in place to make practice changes. Her enthusiasm and motivation in learning to teach in a new way was greatly inspired by students' positive changes in learning.

> *Students have shown their great interest in science learning and they are not afraid of sharing their ideas in science class any more. They spent a lot more time on science projects than on assignments of other subjects. Some teachers teased that students don't care about LA and math subjects because science is the only subject they want to learn.*
>
> *(Sun Laoshi, Conversation 3: 15-08-2007)*

Students' increased interest in learning science was breaking news to Sun because they rarely showed such strong interest in learning due to the boring lectures in classroom. From her comments I could sense her mixed feelings of pride and pressure in this process. On one hand, other teachers' comments indicated their admiration to Sun as well as their recognitions of these positive changes of students; on the other hand, Sun felt pressured by the hidden criticism to the fact that students showed less interest and effort in other school subjects, such as language arts and mathematics because of their focused learning interest in science.

Because science subject has always been treated as "the elective course among elective courses" (Wei, 2008) and the least important subject in schools, Sun had to figure out ways to deal with the tensions and unsupportive structure to sustain the changed practice.

> *Other subject teachers complained to the principal that students didn't finish their homework because they spent too much time on the science project. They meant that I shouldn't give students any homework because science is not the mandatory subject. I was very upset when I heard this kind of complaint.*
>
> *(Sun Laoshi, Conversation 3: 15-08-2007)*

Besides the tensions and conflicts between her and her colleagues, Sun met challenges from lack of support from parents.

> *S: I once gave students homework about observing flotation of objects in different liquids. One student was physically punished by his parent because he used up all the sugar at home to test the flotation of potato in water with sugar. Sometimes I asked students to bring some objects to school for science experiments, but students were very often not allowed to do so because their parents think this type of learning activity is no good for their future. They only cared about language arts and math.*
>
> *G: Did you communicate with parents?*
>
> *S: We held teacher-parent meetings and workshops to communicate with parents about curriculum change. Parents are changing gradually, mainly because science became a subject tested in mid-term and final exams.*
>
> *(Sun Laoshi and Researcher (G),Conversation 3: 15-08-2007)*

Sun's communications with parents helped them understand the curriculum reform and the significance of this new subject, however, the determining factor of the attitude change was the exam-based evaluation. At this point of our conversation, we inevitably came to the topic of the evaluation system.

Meaning 6: The exam-based evaluation system and rigid educational administration are barriers to change

In our mutual exploring of the controlling factors on teachers' change, we again brought up the subject of the impact of exam-based evaluation system on curriculum change. This topic was raised in our second conversation by her comments on parents' increased support to students' science learning because this subject was now included in students' evaluation and in the school exams. This indication led to further discussion of the relationship between curriculum change and the exam-based evaluation system. Compared to the other challenges in curriculum change, she commented that exam-based evaluation was the most controlling factor in changing the practice of teaching and learning:

G: The new curriculum demands changes from many aspects and at all levels. What changes are comparatively easier, and what changes are more difficult to make?

S: Lesson planning and relationship with students are easier to change because I can make my own decisions. Evaluation system is very difficult to change. I could use different strategies to evaluate students' progress, but their exam scores are the only official measure evaluating their learning and performance. This is accepted by most teachers and school leaders. This deep-rooted tradition definitely constrains learning.

G: What about the evaluation of teachers?

S: It is a more complex and difficult issue. Teacher evaluation is related to school evaluation. Schools are evaluated based on students' grades too. Thus in turn teachers are mainly evaluated based on their students' exam scores. Last term our school was consistently criticized by leaders from Education Bureau because students' average grade at our school was lower than it was before. Why should teachers change if they are not evaluated based on their practice? How can change happen if we have to strictly follow bureaucratic requirements? Teachers are under extreme pressures from the top and they surely pass the pressure to their students. This is very obvious.

(Sun Laoshi and Researcher (G),Conversation 3: 15-08-2007)

She was very emotional when talking about the institutionalized barriers in changing practice. Teachers who are experiencing curriculum reform face these prominent issues and pressures every day but whether these struggles were recognized as prioritized issues to deal with in planning and implementing curriculum change is a question. I was convinced during our first two conversations that Sun had the enthusiasm and positive attitude to cope the demands of the new curriculum; however, the above questions she raised made me feel the curriculum reform would be doomed to fail if the institutionalized evaluation structure and practice

were not changed.

Meaning 7: Developing new understandings and strategies on students' evaluation

Because there's very little space to make choices between the new curriculum demands and the unchanged school structure and administrative process, Sun often felt powerless and helpless in her efforts to make changes. While trying to teach in a new way, she was uncertain about the scope and depth of the change herself. But student's increased interest in learning science and their abilities and curiosities demonstrated in class inspired her to try a range of evaluation methods to sustain the positive trends in students' learning.

> *In the past, we always used the phrases like you have got a good grade; you are good at such and such things. Students are no longer satisfied with this type of comments as they were too general and didn't truly reflect their progress. Now the evaluative comments I give students are more encouraging and specific. I would use comments like' congratulations to your new findings in the flotation experiment' or 'you are able to apply science knowledge into your life', etc.*
>
> *(Sun Laoshi, Conversation 3: 15-08-2007)*

The above examples she used specifically for each students indicating her increased awareness to each individual student's learning needs and progress, which in turn required her to pay more attention to student's

unique progress and needs. The language is encouraging and confirming, but more important was that students knew what they did well and where they should improve. Through her practice, Sun had a deeper understanding of the concepts of formative evaluation and summative evaluation. These approaches enabled her to closely observe students' interest, motivation, and attitude towards science learning, which is a required teaching ability according to the new science curriculum. For Sun, this experience was significant because it unfolded the interrelated relationships among teaching, learning, and evaluation and signified a meaningful implementation of the new curriculum in her situation.

Meaning 8: Change is a long term process, but it is disguised and misrepresented by politics

G: Have you had any training opportunities on the new science curriculum?

S: I attended a few trainings on curriculum reform in the past three years…I just came back from another training workshop offered in the capital city. I submitted a work report on curriculum implementation and was told the comments in the report were too negative.

G: Who told you that? What did you say in the report?

S: An official in Provincial Education Department. He told us that education change in our province was in a leading position in the country. I didn't know how he came up with this conclusion. I personally didn't believe what he said at all. We couldn't be in a leading position due to our education environment and reality. In my report I talked about the science

curriculum change progress in our city and I used the phrase like teachers/administrative offices/parents didn't attach importance to science education; I was told to change the phrase into 'teachers/administrative offices/parents didn't fully recognize the importance of science education' because this report would be submitted to UNICEF. It will be read not only by Chinese, but also by international experts.

(Sun Laoshi and Researcher (G),Conversation 1: 07-08-2007)

This dialogue happened at the very beginning of our first conversation. The incident she described sounded so familiar that I didn't even give us an opportunity to discuss further on this topic. I recalled how I was instructed to write a good report or prepare a good demonstration lesson when I was teaching in China. These types of incidents are so common that I didn't feel anything strange about this very first story Sun shared with me. Instead, I shifted the topic into the changes of her practice. However, I was very much intrigued by this personal experience when I listened to the conversations and reviewed the transcripts because it was mentioned again in our second conversation when Sun talked about the administration of the new curriculum.

There are many challenges in implementing the new curriculum, but we're becoming used to this type of situation. It will be a long process but things will change for the better. …We were told that Ningxia was at the leading position of curriculum implementation and required to write reports on the success of curriculum change. These may bring honours to the leaders, but I totally disagree with it. There still are many things to be improved.

(Sun Laoshi, Conversation 2: 10-08-2007)

This conversation is thought-provoking to me. I've been thinking about our dialogues a lot… In the past I was very cautious when talking about curriculum changes to my colleagues, principals and the others because I was afraid of using words or comments inappropriate to their expectations.

(Sun Laoshi, Conversation 3: 15-08-2007)

These disconnected fragments in three conversations started making sense in understanding how teachers' experiences in curriculum reform are disguised by the politics in curriculum administration. As a teacher living her daily life through curriculum change, Sun's challenges not only came from the technical issues in curriculum implementation, but also enforced by the political constraints in sharing her thoughts and reflections. She is situated in a struggling place between what she wants to say and what can be said; and, between her subjectivity and the external power relations. She hoped to obtain understanding and support through sharing the realities and identifying solutions in a collective manner. In her view, her working report reflected the authentic situation, her feelings of isolation, and her sense of the controversial realities in curriculum change. But quite often, her voice was silenced. The opportunity of being heard, understood and supported was deprived in politics and power

relations. Her opportunities of connecting the new curriculum with the reality and her commitment to initiations of change was discouraged by the univocal propaganda discourse about curriculum.

Meaning 9: Promoting participatory and democratic leadership

Talking through her own experiences, Sun admitted she should do better in the future in understanding and supporting her colleagues.

S: As vice principal, I didn't pay enough attention to teachers' needs, though I thought I did. I only attended to the provision of sufficient teaching materials and resources. Through our conversations, I realized teachers needed more support than teaching resources.

G: What else do you think they'll need?

S: They need more professional training. Half of the teachers only attended training workshops once or twice. Teachers were never asked about what they really needed for curriculum change. I am a member of School Education Committee and will suggest a collective plan for teachers' professional development.

...

S: We always say we should give students more opportunities to develop their interests and abilities. Give them opportunities to express themselves. But who gives teachers this opportunity? Quite often teachers had to follow the leaders' directions, even the directions might be wrong. You know, it is our traditions that the subordinates should follow their leaders, it doesn't matter what the top said was right or wrong.

G: I agree that teachers like students actually didn't enjoy much educational democracy. This is a highlight in the new curriculum, but also an empty word. From your experience we can be sure that developing democracy in

Education and curriculum leadership is very important in this reform.

Sun: Exactly. We're required to give students democratic education. But if teachers don't have the opportunity to enjoy democracy, how we can expect them to show it to students? Reform is full of contradictions.

(Sun Laoshi and Researcher (G),Conversation 3: 15-08-2007)

Sun indicated that teachers needed to be heard, guided, and supported, but not to be controlled and manipulated. Her emerging understanding of how teachers' personal experience impact the development of educational democracy demanded by the new curriculum indicates she could see the problem and issues in a concrete and situated way, which is a premise to make changes in practice.

Shi Laoshi: Chinese philosophical traditions are powerful tools in understanding new curriculum

Shi Laoshi's Background

Shi grew up in a farming village of 800 people. In the early 1990s, he passed the very competitive entrance examination to normal school after graduating from junior high and became the fourth person in his village to have the opportunity of receiving an advanced education. After graduating from normal school, he started his teaching career in a Hui minority elementary school, which was located in very remote mountain area and there was no public transportation to the city. He was in a state of perplexity for a long time because the quality of teaching and learning was a big problem and the only objective of a school education was to eliminate illiteracy.

Five years later, he transferred to his current school, which was also a rural school with 400 students and 14 teachers. He later was promoted as principal. Besides his administrative responsibilities, he taught mathematics. English, a subject required to be offered from grade three in elementary schools by the new curriculum, became a new subject offered in his school because of his personal interest in language learning

and strong desire in providing such opportunities to his students. He became an English teacher through self-regulated study and attending some professional training workshops.

Because of his leadership role at school, Shi was highly involved in administration and implementation of two projects alongside with new curriculum implementation. One is a Nine-year Basic Education Universalization Project initiated by the central government and the other is Strengthen Capacity in Basic Education in Western China Project (SCBEWC) sponsored by Ministry of Education (MOE) of China and Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA). The implementation of these two projects was discussed in our conversations and evoked very interesting ideas in curriculum reform and implementation.

Shi was a very thoughtful and visionary teacher and school leader. He was very interested in Chinese philosophical and educational traditions and had done lots of reading and thinking on this aspect for the past fifteen years. His interest led our discussions into a deeper level towards how to improve education and curriculum through mindful applications of Chinese and western traditions and wisdom. I was inspired by his creative thoughts during our conversation and our

email/telephone communications afterwards. Our conversations were conducted in a way that we both felt the need of viewing curriculum change in a bigger cultural, educational, and philosophical context. He was intentionally broadening my horizon on the research topic while I was trying to understand his thoughts on the relationships between Chinese philosophical traditions and the new curriculum.

In one of his emails sent to me five months after our conversations, he shared his reflective thoughts and inspirations gained from the research participation. He was excited, and informed me that he had developed a new visionary statement for his school based on our discussions on education. The new vision statement he created for his school is: *Educ g students beyond time and place and empower them to start life achievements from the first six years in school.* Again I felt greatly inspired, not just by his new ideas, but also by his devotion and enthusiasm to education, by the wisdom and intelligence shown in his words and action.

The meaning of curriculum change for him is presented in the following six themes.

Meanings of Curriculum Reform for Shi Laoshi

Meaning 1: New curriculum is like a big bird and it needs powerful wings

to fly

At the beginning of our conversation, Shi indicated he was very supportive of the rationale of the new curriculum, though he was not quite sure how to apply it to his practice and what strategies could help him create a school culture supporting curriculum implementation. He noticed most teachers were overwhelmed by the complexity of the reform. Practice in his school did not change much until the school became a CIDA project school in 2004.

> *It was fortunate that our school became a CIDA project site when we pondering about how to implement the new curriculum. It brings us hard and soft resources. Hard resource refers to the equipments for distance learning, including computer, printer, camera, and hard drive. Soft resource refers to participatory training on student-centered pedagogy and the ongoing guidance in practice. We've been involved in this project for three years and this project brought lots of change we had never experienced before.*
>
> *(Shi Laoshi, Conversation 1: 06-08-2007)*

Shi commented the teacher training model of the CIDA project was a leverage for curriculum implementation in his school. The participatory training sessions provided by the CIDA project gave him the opportunity of *learning by doing*. Shi found his participation in large group discussions and small group activities during the training were extremely beneficial to

his understanding of the teaching and learning styles advocated by the new curriculum. The concepts of collaborative learning, inquiry learning, constructivism, curriculum integration, and informative and summative assessments emerged in the new curriculum were demonstrated through discussions, group works, guided questions, and practical project works. For him, another very important factor was that he was encouraged to apply what he learned into his practice with regular guidance and follow-up support from teacher trainers.

Because the concept on student-centered pedagogy was initially developed in a western context, I asked him if he had any concerns about whether these new concepts would work in local context. Admitting it was a common concern shared by many teachers, he indicated he was very open to the training model and content.

S: Personally, I don't care if it's Chinese or foreign. Teachers should be like the sea. The lower we position ourselves, the more water we could contain. We should learn from good practice as long as they suit our needs.

G: Right. But learning is not imitating. The new ideas and strategies should be adjusted to the local situations.

S: This is very important. At first teachers copied the instructional methods they learnt into classrooms and were very discouraged when these new methods didn't work well. But after we adjusted the instructional strategies according to our school situations, positive change were obvious.

(Shi Laoshi and Researcher (G),Conversation 1: 06-08-2007)

Shi mentioned the strength of the CIDA project was that it was coherent and integrated with current school work. In addition to the clearly addressed learning objectives, the activities were coordinated with a focus on capacity building. Because he was involved in the training from the very beginning of the project, he was able to take the leadership role in creating a learning community within the school. During our conversation, he repeatedly used the phrase of *our CIDA Project,* indicating the project became an integrated component of his work. Although the project work required a lot more time and effort, he did not feel it as extra burden because of the positive change happened in teaching and learning. Reflecting on the success of leading school's change, he concluded with a very powerful metaphor:

> *The new curriculum is like a bird. It needs powerful wings to fly. CIDA project is the powerful wings. The force comes from resources, the participatory teacher training model, and the structure it established to integrate learning and practice.*
>
> *(Shi Laoshi, Conversation 1: 06-08-2007)*

Meaning 2: Chinese philosophical traditions are powerful tools in making connections with the new curriculum

Shi had a strong interest in Chinese culture and philosophical

traditions and had read a broad range of Chinese classics in the past fifteen years. He viewed this as totally personal interest and did not realize much connection between Chinese traditions with the new curriculum. However, the puzzles and questions on student-centered pedagogy triggered his search for connections and differences between the contemporary educational theories and indigenous traditions. Through comparison, he concluded that many theories and practices advocated in the new curriculum actually shared the same philosophical goal with various Chinese educational and philosophical thoughts, and he said:

> *Many ancient Chinese philosophical traditions, such as Confucianism, Taoism, Buddhism, I Ching, and Legalism, have focused on the development of human beings. Student development is the development of human beings and it is the ultimate goal of the new curriculum. The new curriculum and student-centered pedagogy answer the same philosophical question.*
>
> *(Shi Laoshi, Conversation 2: 10-08-2007)*

According to his understanding, Taoist and Buddhist traditions in China offered a direction for this massive curriculum change. What Taoism can offer is to clarify the fundamental philosophical question framing the new curriculum. For him, it was important to understand the 'Dao' (*way)* of the new national curriculum, that is to say, to understand

the ultimate goal of education before making any meaningful change in practice. He didn't think the new curriculum policy and standards had addressed this fundamental question and that was why there were many ambiguous assumptions in practice.

> *We need to know the bigger picture for curriculum change. But now we only know the specific standards of each subject, but don't know the philosophical foundations and systematic framework supporting the change. Without a bigger picture, implementing the new curriculum is like shooting an elephant without knowing where it is. It doesn't matter how hard you are working towards it, you can't be successful.*
>
> *(Shi Laoshī, Conversation 2: 10-08-2007)*

His comments challenged my prior assumption that school teachers were more interested in practical teaching strategies than theoretical and philosophical understandings of education. Clearly Shi was more interested in the latter. His questioning on philosophical foundations and framework supporting this curriculum change indicated his genuine concern about the future and direction of this massive curriculum change. In his view, the critical issue about curriculum reform was not to question schools and teachers about their curriculum implementation, but to justify whether this new curriculum pointed to a right direction for education. Because the contested field of curriculum reform in China offered no

answers to this philosophical concern, he turned to Chinese traditions and cultures for wisdoms and guidance.

> *According to Confucianism, the fundamental purpose of education is Goodness. It doesn't matter how well the new curriculum is planned, if its purpose is to create scientific weapons to fight against each other, it's doomed to fail.*
>
> *I see lot of similarities between student-centered instruction and Confucian educational thoughts. For example, Confucius draws special attention to educational equality and the needs of the less fortunate members of society. Student centered learning environment pays attention to the students' individual and diverse needs and this view converges with the Confucian perspective that the principle of teaching without discrimination. Confucius always conducts his teaching through dialogues, which is similar to what we termed scaffolding or learning facilitation in modern theory. Confucius also attaches importance to pedagogical relationship as he believes students will first trust his teachers and then follow his way.*
>
> *(Shi Laoshi, Conversation 2: 10-08-2007)*

Again, his comments challenged my prior assumptions about teachers' reactions to educational theories developed in Western context. I have assumed that for teachers who would like to change, they will wholeheartedly embrace the new ideas focusing on student development; and, for those who are resistant to change, they would totally ignore the new concepts and ideas. Shi's critical evaluation on the adaptability of student-centered pedagogy in Chinese context reflects his ability of looking into the deeper and more philosophical factors influencing his

perceptions of teaching, learning, curriculum, and education. This ability enabled him to think beyond the demanded change superficially presented in the curriculum policy documents and to examine what works and what doesn't work in local context. His attitude and response towards the new curriculum and student-centered pedagogy present an opposite position from those scholars who are concerned about the 'hegemony' and 'intrusion' of Western educational theories in China, although his attitude would not necessarily be shared by everyone.

Shi's understanding and appreciation of the ancient wisdoms accumulated during the long history in China enabled him to ground his learning in something he had already known. His findings of the shared philosophical similarities between Chinese philosophical traditions and those new educational theories advocated by the new curriculum shifted his efforts from mastering new instrumental actions and strategies in curriculum implementation to promoting the well beings of students through the new curriculum. This shift made it possible for him to critically review the new ideas and theories and to embrace the excellence of these 'foreign' theories, which many of his colleagues found *"good but not applicable"*.

Understanding the philosophical connections and differences between

new and old reduced Shi's resistance to the new curriculum and enhance his capacity in understanding deeper and broader issues related to curriculum change. Re-examination of cultural heritage made it easier for him to connect the new concepts with prior experiences and to understand the deep root of his identity of being a Chinese teacher and learner. He was empowered by his knowledge in Chinese culture heritage to become a better teacher and school leader. He identified this as the 'trigger' of the change in his teaching and leadership styles. He noted he was changing from *'school manager'* to *'professional learning facilitator'* through sharing his knowledge and reflection on both Chinese wisdom traditions and the new curriculum with his colleagues.

Meaning 3: Having concerns in exploring the relationships between traditions and new knowledge

While Shi found Chinese cultural and educational traditions helped him and his colleagues understand the new curriculum, he was always concerned about talking too much about Chinese traditions in public because he was afraid of being judged as superstitious. During the Cultural Revolution between 1966 and 1976, Chinese customs, beliefs, and traditions were viewed as *the outdated* to be destroyed and eliminated from society and the school curriculum. Keeping Chinese classics at home or

talking about Chinese philosophical traditions were strictly prohibited and could bring disastrous ramifications crisis to the individual or family. Though the event was over for more than 30 years, its impact on a societal view towards Chinese traditional culture and philosophy was still evident. Shi's concerns of being judged as superstitious or politically inappropriate indicated learning about the Chinese wisdom traditions was not supported and fully recognized by society.

Shi indicated he discussed this topic with me with a hope that my research would evoke people's attention on the importance of understanding Chinese philosophical traditions in this unprecedented curriculum reform. He indicated that if he proposed a research topic on education and cultural traditions, it would never be supported by the local teaching and research office because people didn't have enough interest, knowledge, or political will to appreciate this topic. However, he believed that this topic was very necessary and it would inform us about the ultimate goal of the new curriculum.

> *In student-centered educational environment, students become the center of teaching and learning. We should pay attention to each student and to every aspect of students' intelligences. Chinese philosophical traditions have accumulated in-depth understanding and wisdom in human being's development and we can learn a lot from these traditions.*

(Shi Laoshi, Conversation 3: 13-08-2007)

Meaning 4: Consciousness and subjectivity are powerful sources for change

Through comparing the new curriculum to Chinese educational traditions, Shi became more conscious about his subjectivity in the changing process of his practice. He noted *consciousness* was the most powerful force in guiding his practice to a new direction.

> *I now always use encouraging comments on students' progress as these words give students a positive image to follow; I don't physically punish students when they make mistakes because the negative words and actions would become the image I projected on them and in turn they would develop to that direction….*
>
> *(Shi Laoshi, Conversation 2: 10-08-2007)*

His consciousness about the impact of pedagogy and pedagogical relationships transformed his strategies of implementing the new curriculum. His subjectivity in understanding the new curriculum mirrored his stance in curriculum reform. He was able to critically examine the new theories and concepts advocated by new curriculum and training and to explore the philosophical question behind the new curriculum. He acknowledged that there were many problems and issues in curriculum implementation, but his consciousness and subjectivity had

been powerful forces accelerating his change towards a clearer direction.

Meaning 5: Curriculum change is a developmental process of teachers' professionalism

In considering the question of how to improve the quality of professional training for teachers, we began to discuss how the organization, content, and delivery of training could limit or enhance teachers' professionalism. We also talked about how important it was to understand what teachers really needed before providing them with any training sessions. Shi commented that teacher education and development should not only target in-service teachers with experience, but also simultaneously started for pre-service and beginning teachers. His school was assigned two new teachers who recently graduated from local teacher college and he was astonished by their teaching abilities.

S: They didn't know how to teach! Every year we have new teachers and I am really concerned about this situation.

G: What are your concerns? Their teaching experience and skills, or something else?

S: It's understandable that a new teacher needs more experience and skills. I often give the new teachers one week to observe classroom teaching before they actually teach classes. I am more concerned about their outdated perceptions of teaching and learning. They didn't know anything about this new curriculum reform. Teaching and learning are transforming in schools, but teacher education program in college didn't change. New teachers

became disqualified as soon as they graduated from college.

G: I remembered that when I was in university, teacher education programs mainly focused on subject areas and there were very few courses on pedagogy and school curriculum. Classes were basically lectures on subject content. If the program remains the same, graduates from these programs only mastered subject knowledge but not knowledge or skills on pedagogy and curriculum. They would teach in the way they learned from their schooling experiences.

S: Exactly, teacher education is still the same. New curriculum means new standards of teachers' professionalism. Both in-service and pre-service teachers need to meet these new standards to stay in teaching profession. Those who don't will lose their jobs. This is a revolutionary change.

(Shi Laoshi and Researcher (G),Conversation 3: 13-08-2007)

He emphasized that the new curriculum meant higher professional standards for teachers. Improving teachers' professionalism was the only way to meet these new standards and demanding tasks. He understood that teachers' professionalism was manifested in many aspects of the profession and teachers needed to greatly enhance their professionalism to stay in the profession. He saw the current issue was that only in-service teachers were charged with the change pressures. It was problematic when the new curriculum was imposed on teachers and they were not at a voluntary decision in making the change; meanwhile, pre-service teacher education programs did not prepare to-be-teachers with professionalism demanded by the new curriculum. This became a very serious problem for

the schools.

Meaning 6: Experiencing dilemmas and powerlessness in the process of curriculum administration

In talking about the conditions impacting curriculum change, Shi didn't think the local conditions were ready for this unprecedented curriculum change. Paralleling with the task of implementing the new national curriculum, another task faced by all teachers and schools in Yuan Zhou city was to pass the evaluation of the Universalizing Nine-year Compulsory Education Project, a program embarked by the government of China as a national strategy for eliminating poverty and improving educational quality and accessibility, particularly in rural areas. Shi mentioned they started preparing for this national evaluation in 1997 and finally passed it in Sept. 2006. In his perception, most of the administrative work they had to do to cope with the demands from this program was unrealistic:

> *Teaching and students supervision were not the most important during this time. We quite often had to cancel regular class time to create fake reports and student profiles which didn't exist in the past. The program evaluation forms were very complicated and sometimes we had to do lots of repetition because of the wrong instruction from the top. We all had to work till ten o'clock almost every evening to write these reports, forms, plans, etc. Even the regular class time was not guaranteed. Who has the time to care about curriculum reform?*

(Shi Laoshi, Conversation 3: 13-08-2007)

He was frustrated because the new curriculum implementation was not at the top agenda of the local administration. Despite of the strong interest and responsibility in strengthening the student-centered teaching and learning in his school, he felt helpless and powerless in moving it ahead due to the unbearable workload imposed on him and his colleagues. On one hand, he was clear about his leadership role in improving the quality of teaching and learning, on the other hand, he had to follow local authorities' instructions on how to pass the numerous administrative inspections and evaluations, which focused on other issues such as school management, safety issues, sanitation of the school environment, and extra-curricular activities than the quality of teaching and learning. Because his school was basically evaluated on files and paper work, teaching and learning practice was neglected and became the least prioritized work at school. Teachers were too occupied by these administrative demands to have enough time and energy to implement the new curriculum. Ignoring these tasks was not an option because

> *All these demands are political tasks and I have no other choice except for completing them. Otherwise, I'll be either publically criticized at the meetings or be fired. There are no explicit standards or inspection on*

curriculum reform. Therefore whether new curriculum is implemented successfully or not doesn't mean a lot to many schools.

(Shi Laoshi, Conversation 3, 13-08-2007)

He felt he was positioned in a situation of dilemma between assuming a political and administrative leadership role and an instructional leadership role. He understood the importance of his leadership role in facilitating teachers' change in practice, but felt powerless in fostering a student-centered school environment within the unchanged education and school structure.

Another issue was the autonomy of choosing curriculum materials. Though schools were legally granted the freedom to choose textbooks and other materials based on local context by the new curriculum, the present curriculum administration structure did not allow this to happen at the school level.

School conditions and contexts in our province are very diverse. There are lots of differences between small and big schools; between Han ethnicity and Hui ethnicity schools. But most schools in our province are using the same textbooks. We don't have the autonomy and flexibility to choose or develop the curriculum materials suitable to our school condition. Curriculum administration is still centralized at the provincial levels. This is a big constraint. For school development, it's important to adopt curriculum suitable to our school context.

(Shi Laoshi, Conversation 3, 13-08-2007)

One objective of the new curriculum was to decentralize curriculum administration into three levels: central government, local authorities, and schools. Clearly this objective had not happened at school level. Shi's lived experiences informed us that the unchanged structure for curriculum administration was an obstacle in curriculum implementation. Changing the current curriculum administrative structure should be a powerful impetus in teacher and school development, but was completely out of teachers' power and control. Development of school-based curriculum is only an empty promise made to teachers if the current curriculum administrative system is not changed.

Wan Laoshi: My teaching rational finally becomes legitimate and acceptable

Wan Laoshi's Background

Wan graduated from local teachers' college and has been a math teacher in an urban junior high school for ten years. He taught mathematics at various grades in junior high, most recently grade seven.

His ethnicity is Hui, a minority ethnicity in China but the largest ethnicity in Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region. Wan is quiet and enjoys thinking. He always kept a close and open relationship with his students, though was consistently reminded that this type of relationship was no good to his authority as a teacher. He always paid attention to students' active engagement in learning but had to use some participatory teaching strategies *secretively* because they were in contradiction with the authoritarian norm of teaching before curriculum change.

At the beginning of our first conversation, I shared with him some of the ideas and questions, around which we both enjoyed the free flow of thoughts sparked around the topic of curriculum reform. The very first conversation also served as a moment for our rapport building. Knowing my home province in Eastern China, he instantly showed an increased

interest in my personal background because he once received warm hospitality and generous help from a local family there when they travelled to that place. This incident suddenly made us feel close to each other during our conversations.

Before we started the second conversation, he told me the openness and sincerity shown in our first conversation was beyond his expectation and he really enjoyed the ideas and thoughts we exchanged on curriculum reform. He had received the notes and questions I sent to him after the first conversation but preferred not to continue our conversation according to the questions I prepared. I was happy with his suggestion because I sensed the necessity to follow his intuitions and interests in whatever he was willing to share with me.

Although I had explained the research was a mutual learning opportunity for both of us, his eagerness to obtain more knowledge and information on the new curriculum from me was obvious. He raised many questions and asked for my insights on things he felt puzzled, which inspired me to think more broadly about my research. Quite a few times I indicated to him that his questions and ideas had brought new information to me and he seemed very surprised and excited to know that his ideas had expanded my understanding about curriculum change. As a

result, my appreciation of his reflections on the new curriculum encouraged him to raise more questions and ideas he didn't have before.

The following themes represent meanings I identified as arising from the three conversations with Wan.

Meanings of Curriculum Reform for Wan Laoshi

Meaning 1: Shaping a new understanding about curriculum

We started our conversation with his perceptions about curriculum and education. Wan noted he obtained a much broader understanding about curriculum through readings and personal reflection. The change in curriculum understanding activated a series of changes in his practice.

W: In the past the textbook was curriculum. Now I think curriculum also includes pedagogical relationships and classroom interactions.

G: How was this change reflected in your teaching?

W: I used to transmit concepts and knowledge to students. Now I am using examples to connect the math content with students' lives. This is a big change. In addition, the new math curriculum contains other subject content, such as Physics. When I am not very clear about these interdisciplinary concepts, I would ask my colleagues for explanation. I didn't have to do this before. I wonder if collaborative teaching is one of the objectives of the new curriculum.

(Wan Laoshi and Researcher (G), Conversation 1: 09-08-2007)

In explaining the changes happened in the way he taught and

interacted with students and colleagues, Wan demonstrated a broader understanding of curriculum and teaching. Though he didn't clearly state that his perceptions of curriculum were changing or transforming, the change and transformation was evident to me because he talked more on the new ways of dealing with textbooks, pedagogical relationships, and the increased collaborative teaching demands generated by the new curriculum . Interestingly, during our conversations, new math curriculum standards were not discussed at all. Because curriculum standards have replaced the old subject syllabus as a guiding document to guide teaching and learning and were the mandatory content of teachers' training, I assumed the standards would be an unavoidable topic in our conversations. However, the topic and experience on new curriculum standards was absent during our talk, despite the fact that it had become very popular discourse in curriculum documents and readings.

In understanding the new curriculum and its demands, Wan faced many unsolved questions: What's wrong with what we did in the past? Why did we need to change? What was the rationale supporting the new structure of the textbooks? Where do we start to cope with the change? What should a teacher do when the curriculum content does not reflect local situations?

He indicated that he felt situated in an ambiguous space. On one hand, the curriculum policy granted a teacher the autonomy to choose or develop appropriate curriculum materials for local context; on the other hand, he was informed by school principal that teachers didn't have the right to make the decision on curriculum materials. This contradictory reality represented a huge gap between what it is said on the curriculum policy and standards and how the new curriculum is actually administered and understood in schools.

Though his understanding of curriculum became broader, his view of textbook as the most important component of curriculum remained the same. His repeated question of why the structure of the textbook changed this way reminded me that the concepts of curriculum standards, curriculum materials, and teaching were disconnected fragments in his practice and this disconnection caused great challenges when he had to teach the subject in an inter-disciplinary manner.

Meaning 2: Feeling lost in the complexity of curriculum change

Wan indicated he felt very lost in the complexity of the changes. Had read books and articles on the new curriculum, but he was still disconnected with the new educational theories and pedagogic concepts

introduced by the curriculum documents and interpretive readings. He said:

> *I don't have enough theoretical knowledge of pedagogy, psychology, and cognitive science and can't fully understand these theories discussed in the books about the new curriculum. I was confused by the new terms, such as: behaviourism, cognitive science, constructivism, multiple intelligence theory etc. I am not clear which on earth is correct.*
>
> *(Wan Laoshi: Conversation 1: 09-08-2007)*

In his view, the new curriculum was framed upon modern educational theories developed in the Western context. Learning on these theories and concepts was a blind spot in his educational background because it was not included in the teacher education program he received from college. The in-service training sessions he had to attend didn't ease his confusion because the theories presented were too disconnected from his practice.

> *I feel very confused in practice. As a learner, I prefer individual learning and thinking. As a teacher, I can't impose my learning style to students, but I haven't fully understood why we should promote student's collaborative learning and what collaborative learning means.*
>
> *(Wan Laoshi, Conversation 1: 09-08-2007)*

Wan indicated that the new curriculum was like a college text for an elementary student. He could read all the words, but couldn't figure out

what they actually meant. The lack of connection between his prior learning experience and professional practice increased the difficulties of understanding the complex web of theories and concepts. During our conversations, he was very eager to share with me the memorable teaching incidents and examples but noted it was very difficult for him to articulate these moments through the new terms and theories. He said he was like a bad actor: he's on the stage every day but could not make connections between his performance and his daily life. The text of the script was too absurd and complex for him to understand.

Meaning 3: The new curriculum legitimates his prior values and beliefs in teaching and learning

Wan recalled his positive learning experience in schools and the observation of his former teachers' had very positive impact on his own teaching style. During his teaching career, democracy has been valued as an important concept in his teaching and he always enjoyed a democratic relationship with students; however, his value of educational democracy was considered odd by his colleagues and suppressed by traditional educational practices in the past. He recalled during the first week of his teaching career, he was taught to "*be kind to students in heart, but not on face*" by the school principal. Showing teacher's authority to students was

considered a must-have strategy to ensure students follow a teacher's instructions inside and outside of classroom. Wan indicated he didn't follow what the principal told him because he valued equality and democracy in his relationship with students. But he could not argue publically against what he was told because that was the mainstream belief in being a good teacher.

> *I don't have to hide my thoughts and values anymore because educational democracy is what is emphasized in the new curriculum. I didn't feel very much challenged by the new curriculum because it legitimates the beliefs and values I held in the past. The new curriculum actually emancipated me from the depressing environment.*
>
> *(Wan Laoshi, Conversation 1: 09-08-2007)*

Meaning 4: Longing for high-quality school-based professional development opportunities

Wan indicated he recently read two books related to the curriculum reform: *Constructivism* and *Dialogues on Curriculum Implementation*. He thought the books were well written, but were too theoretical and abstract for him. Discussing what would be the best way to support his learning, he commented the most efficient way was to make efficient use of the weekly structured teaching-research activity time, which was a 40-90 minute group professional development time assigned weekly in most

Chinese schools. He expressed his disappointment with the organization and content of such activities at his school:

> *We sometimes do group lesson-planning; sometimes take test on the new curriculum, When we took the test, we just copied answers from the reference books. This type of activity has no value at all and teachers are not interested either.*
>
> *(Wan Laoshi, Conversation 2: 12-08-2007)*

He reminded me of my own experience in organizing the weekly teaching-research activity when I was a department head at school. Teaching-research professional development time was the most structured weekly period for teachers to conduct group study and reflection on teaching and learning, and to disseminate information from school administration to teachers. The topics of the activity covered teaching observation, school-based research, lesson planning, teachers' evaluation, policy studies, extracurricular activities, and other administrative tasks. Excitement and boringness were the mixed feelings I often had, depending on the topics and facilitations of learning. If poorly planned and structured, teachers would rather to stay with students in classrooms, or it could become a time of group gossip.

Wan believed more creative and engaging activities should be

recommended and provided. He was currently involved in developing school-based curriculum and found it an effective way for his professional development. Encouraged by the research method used in this study, he suggested conversation as a new form in school-based professional learning activities.

W: I hope to have more opportunities to dialogue with experts on the new educational theories and the new curriculum, like what we are doing now. Thus my puzzles and questions can be answered in time.

G: I don't view myself as an expert. I believe we all have unique experiences in addressing the issues in practice. If we are open and care about the topic, we'll learn and grow together.

W: But your comments evoked my deeper thinking and I have had many reflections on my teaching beliefs and practice. Though information sharing is two-way in our conversations, you are actually leading my thinking. I'd never felt this way when I conversed with my colleagues.

G: Maybe the difference is that I am prepared for each conversation. And I paid lots of attention to what you said and tried to share my thoughts from a different perspective. Equal participation and horizon expanding is my goal of our conversations.

W: (These conversations are) typical student-centered. You are the teacher and I am the student (laugh).

G: Do you think it will work as a form for teaching-research activity?

W: I think so. It might not work well for discussions on educational theories as teachers' academic background are very similar. But we could converse about the practical issues we encountered in teaching practice and professional learning.

(Wan Laoshi and Researcher (G), Conversation 3: 15-08-2007)

He indicated that if the quality of teaching-research activities was improved the central government wouldn't have to spend too much money on those ineffective teacher training workshops. He emphasized that he was wholeheartedly in favour of the new curriculum because it opened a new window of education and the teaching profession. He noted professional learning was not simply a personal interest, but became an integrated part of his professional life. The concept of lifelong learning made more sense to him and that was he needed to do to meet the demands of the curriculum change.

He realized that teachers needed systematic and consistent support to increase their capacity in teaching and learning in a new way. The current educational system and structure certainly couldn't meet these needs:

> *We spent lots of time on meetings and administrative tasks at school. As a 班主任 (home classroom teacher), I spend one third of my working time on administrative tasks, such as recess supervision, classroom cleaning etc. I am too busy to have any time and energy in learning new things about the new national curriculum. If these situations don't change, I believe this curriculum reform will fail. Teachers have reached the extreme of pressures. I feel really sad whenever I read news about teachers' lives. It's not about money; it's about life survival.*
>
> *(Wan Laoshi, Conversation 3: 15-08-2007)*

I sensed his desperation in experiencing tremendous pressures from

heavy workload, long working hours, examinations, students' safety issues, and community. His comments indicated that his enthusiasm and initiation in change was very much depressed by the current school system and administration. His sadness and desperation on the teaching profession and were clear signals of issues should not be neglected in the process of curriculum reform.

Zhao Laoshi: For some teachers, curriculum change is a day dream

Zhao's Background

Zhao teaches in a rural town center elementary school 50 miles away from Yuan Zhou city. Because the facilities and quality of teaching of this school are better than the village schools, parents prefer sending their children to this school even it's quite far away from their home. The average class size is 50 students with exception that Kindergarten is the biggest class with 90 students. Zhao teaches Grade three Math and music for all grades. She is also the Head of the Teaching Affairs Office and takes administrative responsibilities for the quality of teaching and learning.

She is a young, enthusiastic, and dedicated teacher and she has been teaching for five years after graduating from local teacher's college. During the first several years of her teaching career, she took all possible opportunities to learn how to be a teacher. Her father, a retired school teacher, has been a great mentor in her life and career. Influenced by her father, she wanted to become a teacher since she was very young. She feels very satisfied as a teacher and enjoys her work and relationship with students.

She's married with a five-year-old daughter, who goes to the kindergarten at her school. Because it is not convenient to travel between her school and her home in the city, she and her daughter live in teacher's residence on campus during the week and they go back to their home in the city to spend the weekends with her husband, who works and lives in the city. She hopes to transfer to a city school in the future so that the family can live together, but she is not sure about the possibility because teaching positions in city schools are very limited and competitive.

Zhao was always very well prepared for each conversation and her feedback and additions to the summary of each conversation was in time and thoughtful. The following themes on the meanings of curriculum change were identified and presented as follows.

Meanings of Curriculum Reform for Zhao Laoshi

Meaning 1: Student-centered pedagogy and new curriculum implementation is day dream for teachers who have to teach big classes

Our first conversation started with sharing of our mutual backgrounds. Talking about the situations of curriculum reform at her school, Zhao started right away with the big size of classes.

I am responsible for the quality of teaching and professional learning of

teachers at school. It is very difficult to talk about new curriculum with the teacher who has to supervise 90 kids in classroom. We feel very lucky if the teacher can keep all kids in the same room. It's impossible to care about students' learning needs in such a big class.

(Zhao Laoshi, Conversation 1: 06-08-2007)

The class size she mentioned may surprise teachers who teach in Eastern China or the other parts of the world, but it is not uncommon in Western China due to poverty and deficient educational investment. I recalled the dramatic emotions I encountered when I visited a grade one class with more than 100 kids at an adjoining county several years ago. I was traveling with some Canadian teacher educators and the purpose of that trip was to provide follow-up support to teachers who had received training on new curriculum and student-centered pedagogy. I felt it ridiculous and unrealistic to talk about curriculum reform and improvement of teaching with teachers who had to teach such a big class because the challenges brought by the unreasonable teacher-student ratio should be prioritized problem to deal with than asking teachers to improve their teaching practices through implementing a new curriculum.

Even though the grade three classes Zhao taught only had 50 students, she indicated it was not an easy task to get them all engaged in meaningful learning activities. Now she faced a new learning topic of

classroom management, which in the past was not a prominent issue because there was not much interaction in the class. But a big class size had become the most difficult obstacle when she tried to foster a more student-centered classroom environment and to meet the diverse needs of students. Given the large number of students and limited space in classroom, she found it was extremely challenging to organize activities to engage students' active participation. In the situations where she managed to organize some group work or interactive activities for students, she could hardly control the classroom situations and teaching pace because of the lack of skills and experiences in classroom management.

> *Because the class size is big, implementing new curriculum sometimes is like a day dream for me. Many other teachers are in similar situations.*
>
> *(Zhao Laoshi, Conversation 1: 06 - 08-2007)*

Despite the difficulties she encountered and the big class size, Zhao indicated she had made positive changes since the new curriculum was introduced to school. She was able to pay more attention to students who were neglected in the past and meeting the diverse needs of students became a conscious objective in lesson planning and classroom instruction. Her skills in applying interactive instructional and classroom

management strategies had improved and demonstrated positive learning outcomes.

Meaning 2: Good exam results and students' problem-solving abilities are parallel goals of teaching.

While sharing with me her teaching background, Zhao indicated that she had always been evaluated as a good teacher at school because the test results of her class were always on top in annual district-wide standard tests. She had also received many teaching awards and bonus salary because of the good exam results of her students. She emphasized students' exam scores were very important because a teacher's reputation was based and built on exam scores. Talking about the changes she made since she used new curriculum reform and the goal of her teaching, she said:

Li: I think a teacher should be evaluated based on students' performance and abilities. I give students more opportunities to develop their ability in learning and have reduced the lecture time in class. My instructional methods are changing, but the goal of teaching doesn't change.

G: What is your goal of teaching?

Z: To make sure students have good exam results, and develop their ability in learning at the same time. I have realized that students' ability is equally important as knowledge. Knowledge is still very important for students because it serves as a solid foundation for their future study.

G: Besides knowledge, there're other things important for students too. What do you think?

Z: Both knowledge and good learning skills are very important. We have to face the reality. To go to university, students need good scores to obtain the opportunity to take the national entrance exam in a good senior high school. Good exam score means opportunities of going to university and it is the only thing valued by parents, teachers, student themselves and community.

(Zhao Laoshi and Researcher (G),Conversation 1: 06-08-2007)

The above dialogue indicated that teachers' pressure from examination was not reduced because of the new curriculum. Students' mid-term and final term exams were the main criteria adopted by school, parents and community to evaluate a teacher's work and job performance. Admitting helping students get good test scores was the most important for her, she was not satisfied with the fact that teachers were evaluated simply on students' exam results. During our second conversation she commented more on the current evaluation system and pointed out it was in fact leading learning and teaching to an opposite direction tuned by the new curriculum. Though the new curriculum required that both formative and summative strategies should be used to evaluate students and teachers, they were neither reflected in practice nor supported by the system.

Meaning 3: Curriculum reform is an opportunity of re-examining perceptions on teaching and learning. Changing conceptions are difficult, but changing practice is even more challenging.

Since the new curriculum was introduced to her school, Zhao's perceptions of teaching and learning changed with the applications of some new instructional strategies in practice.

> *Before curriculum reform, my teaching was like force-feeding ducks. I usually presented math problems on blackboard and asked students to watch, think and then I explain the problem-solving process. All I did was to present the textbook content and knowledge to students. It was so boring that students often fell into sleep during class, especially in the afternoons. But now I am trying some new teaching methods and giving students more opportunities to solve the math problems by themselves.*
>
> *(Zhao Laoshi, Conversation 1: 06-08-2007)*

Zhao perceived learning as a process of acquiring or accumulating knowledge and skills and teaching as a means to prepare students to pass the national college entrance examination. This perception defined her teaching as delivery of the content prescribed in course syllabus and textbooks. She was disengaged in the decision-making process of curriculum materials and content. Teaching started from syllabus, textbooks, and exam papers, proceeded in the direction of students' accumulations of knowledge, and then of taking exams. Examination was the 'baton' determining the teaching and learning content and process.

Acknowledging exam results were still important indicators of good teaching and learning, she viewed curriculum change as an opportunity to re-examine her perceptions of teaching and learning. She had formed some new understandings about teaching, learning, pedagogic relationship and education, which enabled her to experience alternative ways of teaching when she tried to apply the new concepts and methods prescribed in the new curriculum into her practice

> *Students were very passive in their learning in the past. Now I often give students some math problems connected to their life experiences. Sometimes students had the opportunities to create math problems and find solutions by themselves. This type of exercise still represented the major concepts from the textbook but students found it more exciting and interested to learn because it makes sense in their daily life.*
>
> *(Zhao Laoshi, Conversation 1: 06-08-2007)*

Her statements suggested she was shifting from knowledge transmission to developing students' skills, ability, and attitude in learning, which was a direction required by the new national curriculum. Acknowledging changes in conceptions of teaching and learning was a long-term process with tremendous ambiguities and puzzles, she pointed out change in practice was even more complex and challenging because it not only demanded students and teachers' new understanding of teaching

and learning, but also required collaborative professional learning culture and very supportive educational system, which was absent from her current situation.

> *My teaching is changing gradually. I have figured out many strategies to improve the teaching efficiency. For example, I created different symbols indicating the errors students made in their workbook. I think a lot about how to teach more efficiently instead of spending more time tutoring students after school. Students' exam results are as good as they were before. It is proved that lecturing on textbook content doesn't help students achieve deep learning. But not all teachers agreed with what I did and I feel really upset. Some teachers think I am the blind cat catching a dead mouse.*
>
> *(Zhao Laoshi, Conversation 1: 06-08-2007)*

She was certain that the positive change in practice was not accidental, but her colleague's unconvincing attitude reflected the isolation she felt in the change process. It echoed her comments that changing teaching practice was more difficult than changing conceptions due to the lack of supportive structure and culture.

Meaning 4: Reconstructing teaching identity and pedagogical relationship evolves pedagogic, cultural, and psychological decision-making moments

Zhao realized the new curriculum charged teachers with a task of reforming their current teaching identity and pedagogical relationships. She struggled between the envisioned teachers' identity and pedagogical

relationship in the new curriculum standards and the ones she constructed through her life. She indicated she was consistently reminded by her father that *being a teacher for a day means being a parent for life,* a Chinese proverb depicting teachers' authority and moral responsibility as well as students' obligations to follow teachers' words in the learning process.

> *Z: At the beginning of my teaching career, I believed establishing an authoritarian image in front of my students was the first thing I had to do as a new teacher, especially as a female teacher. Standing on the platform in the classroom was one way to show my authority as a teacher. Now the situations are quite different. I moved away from the central platform and stood side by side with students in classrooms. My relationships with students are more equal.*
>
> *G: Do you think you and students are in a truly equal relationship?*
>
> *Z: Not really. But I am trying to make it more equal and give more students attention in class. I'd like to give each student some attention in class, but I haven't figured out how to do this…*
>
> *Now I can see things from students' perspectives. This is a big change for me. I took many things for granted in the past. I once believed that sitting quietly and listening to teachers' lectures was the only way to learn. It was as natural as we walk with two legs. The new curriculum makes me realize teaching and learning could be very diverse and learning could be enjoyable.*
>
> *(Zhao Laoshi and Researcher (G),Conversation 2: 10-08-2007)*

The shift of her standing positions from the center of the stage to the middle of students signified a radical change in her understanding of

teacher identity and pedagogical relationships. This was not obvious when we conducted our conversation, but impressed me greatly when I re-listened to the recordings later. In Chinese context where students were socially expected to respect and follow teachers' instructions, educational democracy and equal pedagogic relationship were contesting concepts for both teachers and students. In her experience, encouraging students to examine her instruction in a critical manner and to speak out their minds or thoughts in class was actually a dilemmatic decision-making process, pedagogically, culturally, and psychologically.

Through experiencing, pondering, and reflecting on these teaching incidents and moments, Zhao was testing and negotiating a new professional and social identity as a teacher. This identity negotiation process was interrelated with the changes of pedagogical relationship in practice and urged her to construct an understanding of pedagogical relationship. Admitting fundamental changes in teaching identity and pedagogic relationship would not be easily made in practices, Zhao desired more support in establishing a new teaching identity to support students' overall development in a long run.

Meaning 5: Physical punishment as a hidden pedagogy

Corporal punishment became a focused topic in our conversations when Zhao described how she learned to be a 'good' teacher and to establish her authority in front of students. Physical punishment was one effective student management strategy shared among teachers, publicly and privately. She claimed that she was not in favour of disciplining students through physical punishment; however, she admitted physical punishment was one of the disciplinary measures she used once in a while because she found this an effective approach for her as a young female teacher.

Z: I sometimes used a baton to hit student' palms if they didn't finish schoolwork in time. I didn't really want to hurt them, but wanted to send them a message that they needed to finish their homework. I often felt sorry about what I did afterwards.

G: Have you tried other approaches to motivate students to finish their homework? When they grow up and become parents or teachers, they may use the same method to their children or students because this is what they learnt to deal with unsatisfactory behaviours.

Z: I have never thought about what they would do in the future. You are right, my five-year old daughter often responded with physical violence when she was not happy with what I said and did. This is what she learned from me.

(Zhao Laoshi and Researcher (G), *Conversation 2: 10-08-2007*)

Z: I realized that I didn't give much attention and reflection to my teaching acts. For instance, I have never imagined how physical punishment they

received from school impact their future lives. You reminded me to think about the pedagogic intent of my actions.

(Zhao Laoshi, Conversation 3: 13-08-2007)

Corporal punishment has been a disciplinary measure associated with the authoritarian tradition for a long time in China. Though corporal punishment has been banned since the *Compulsory Education Law of the People's Republic of China* was published in 1986, it still exists in many Chinese schools, especially in the Western China. Each teacher participant of this study in some way talked about physical punishment during our conversations and I felt really uncomfortable about this fact because corporal punishment had become a rare phenomenon in schools in Eastern China when I started teaching in school. Her reflection during our third conversation reminded me that it was not simply a habitual pedagogical action for teachers, in a deeper sense; it demonstrated teachers' deficiency of knowledge and skills in effective disciplinary strategies in teaching and learning.

In responding to her statement, I intended to convey that physical punishment was more a pedagogic issue than a legal issue. It was an issue reflecting a teacher's perception of pedagogy, effective teaching and learning, and the roles of students and teachers. In her perception,

corporate punishment was only a traditional disciplinary strategy accepted commonly by schools and society and she was not aware the pedagogic intent behind these approaches because they were rarely publicly discussed and reflected upon. Her realization of the pedagogic impact and consequence of physical punishment indicated a need to incorporate discussions and strategies on effective discipline into teacher's professional learning and development, at least for teachers in Western China.

Meaning 6: Parents also need to change their understandings about education in order to support changes in teaching and learning at school

Zhao tried many new methods to develop students' problem-solving skills in practice and identified some strategies that worked well for her students. One strategy she felt very effective was to give students opportunities to do peer teaching. Instead of marking students' homework all by herself, she asked students to teach one another the solutions they found in solving the math problems. Students were excited about taking a teaching role in the small group and eager to explain the ideas and skills they used for each math problem. Zhao found this worked better than simply assigning students' homework and giving them a mark on the

notebook the next day because they were able to internalize the thinking and problem solving skills they learned from each other. And the most important, students were able to develop problem-solving and critical thinking skills in a more efficient way and had more free time for them at home. However, this new approach of dealing with students' homework caused great concerns from parents.

Z: A parent called principal and complained I didn't mark students' homework. Meantime, some parents presented an appreciation flag to one of my colleagues because she sacrificed her spare time to tutor students after school. I felt very upset and pressured as these two incidents happened simultaneously. Principal came to me and suggested I use the old way to deal with students' homework. He didn't try to understand the purpose of my new way of assigning homework. Their standards of judging a good teacher were whether you spent extra hours tutoring students or mark students' homework daily. I think it devastating to push students to study long hours in and outside of school without giving them enough time to play.

G: You might need to explain to the principal and parents why you used this method to deal with homework.

Z: That's what I did. I called on a teacher-parent meeting after this incident to explain why I changed the way of assigning students' homework. This was only one of the difficult situations I experienced. Sometimes my colleagues and the principal suggested that I use the old ways to avoid these types of conflictions and misunderstandings. Students' learning outcomes are better, the efforts I made in changing my teaching was not appreciated and supported. I felt very frustrated.

(Zhao Laoshi and Researcher (G),Conversation 3: 13-08-2007)

She worked hard to expand her professional capacity to cope with the demands of the new curriculum, but encountered misunderstandings and pressures from inside and outside of school. A supportive culture for changes was absent at school and local community. The teaching incident she described above urged her to communicate with colleagues, parents, and community about the changes happening in teaching, but her progress was greatly constrained by the unconstructive leadership and absence of support and collaboration within her school. She felt disappointed and discouraged by the principal's compromised attitude towards external pressures and concerned about the sustainability of the changes she had made so far.

Fu Laoshi: Curriculum change is not only methodological, but also cultural

Fu's Background

Graduating from the local teacher's college, Fu has been teaching Chinese Language Arts in an urban junior high school for 12 years. Later he obtained a bachelor's degree from Provincial University through self-study. In addition to teaching, he was the Secretary- General of the

Youth League, a student organization committed to student's moral education and extra curriculum activities.

Fu's school became a CIDA project school in 2003 so he had the opportunities to get involved in some training sessions and activities related to student-center pedagogy introduced by CIDA project. His direct experience in SCI teacher training inspired his close examination of the Chinese educational traditions and those reflected in the new national curriculum. He was able to locate his thinking and reflection in the subject context and identified many topics closely related to Language Arts Education in China.

The topics indentified in our conversations were generated from my initially requesting and receiving biographical information about his education background and past teaching experiences, from our discussion of curriculum reform as it relates to the challenge and difficulties language teachers face, and from the our mutual reflections on Chinese and Western educational traditions. The complexity of curriculum reform began to manifest itself as we probed more deeply into the meaning of curriculum change. The following six themes are the result of a deeper level of interpretive analysis in which I was attempting to arrive at the meaning of curriculum change as it relates to Fu's sense of what it is essentially mean

for him to experience the change process.

Meanings of Curriculum Reform for Fu Laoshi

Meaning 1: Curriculum change is a process of insecurity and uneasiness

Our first conversation started with his experience and feelings about curriculum reform. Fu expressed firmly that curriculum change in China was necessary and the objectives defined by the new national curriculum would benefit students in many different ways. However, he admitted that he didn't understand what would be meaningful changes for him. His understanding of curriculum changes resided in the change of textbook and curriculum standards as replacement of teaching syllabus.

> *The new curriculum standards look good, but I don't understand them very well because I have not heard any formal explanation of these standards and how relevant they are to practice. The texts and topics to teach and test used to be the content of syllabus, but now they become an appendix of the new curriculum standards. To me, knowledge is still the focus of teaching.*
>
> *(Fu Laoshi, Conversation 1: 07-08-2008)*

In his understanding, curriculum change was represented by the altered structure of the curriculum documents and the updated content in the new textbooks. There was not much difference between the new curriculum standards and the old syllabus in terms of the approach of

using them in practice. But unconsciously, he talked about some changes happened in his practice because of the way the new curriculum standards were structured and presented.

F: When I just started teaching, I strictly followed the procedures on the syllabus. But now presenting the textbook content is not the only focus of my teaching. I consider more about students' ability and interests in lesson planning and instruction. Besides knowledge, students are the center of my teaching.

G: How do you teach now?

F: When I teach a new text, I first analyze it myself, and then present my analysis to students.

G: Do you think your interpretation of the text is the best answer?

F: I wouldn't say it's the best. I feel secure about this type of teaching. Of course people will have different understandings about the same text because of their background and experiences. But as a teacher, I am the one having access to information and resources and my analysis is based on the information I could get. I know what the most appropriate answer for exams. I feel secure about teaching this way because students have to take exams.

(Fu Laoshi and Researcher (G), Conversation 1: 07-08-2008)

Fu's remarks indicated a contradictory reality in which he was situated. He thought his teaching had become more student-centered, but his words clearly indicated knowledge, textbook, and exams were still the most important factors influencing his practices. Attention to students' learning styles, affection, and attitude was increased in his lesson planning,

but was not fully presented in his practice. He also commented that students expected him to *cram* them with knowledge and information and often asked him to provide more direct and clear explanation about the texts in Language Arts class. Realizing students were taught to respect, comply, listen, and follow teachers' instructions in their prior learning history; he commented that it was very difficult to change the teaching and learning styles as requested by the new curriculum because both teachers and students felt secure and comfortable in the familiar ways of teaching and learning. For him, the feeling of insecurity impeded his initiation and encourage in changing his practice. This feeling of insecurity, again, reflects the identity crisis a teacher is experiencing in curriculum change and calls for attention to a teacher's needs of maintaining or enhancing his/her identity.

Fu understood that the goal of the new curriculum was to find solutions to the drawbacks of traditional education, such as students' lack of initiation and creativity, weak problem-solving skills, and neglect of students' diverse learning styles and needs in education process. But what troubled him was that the direction of change was too opaque and abstract and he didn't feel safe to change the way of his teaching before knowing where he would head. In addition, he was still evaluated based on

students' exam scores, which greatly constrained the room he could manipulate in changing process.

He also commented that curriculum change was an uneasy topic to be discussed between him and his colleagues because most teachers in his school were not interested in learning new teaching methods and skills advocated by the new curriculum. At his school, the resistance to curriculum change was collective. Situating in a context where the education system and reality was inconsistent with what was prescribed in the new curriculum, Fu's biggest challenge was to find ways to walk through the zones of uncertainty and insecurity and reduce the contradictions he couldn't handle by himself.

Meaning 2: many changes are not only methodological, but also cultural

Fu emphasized that many educational values and practices pervasive in Chinese schools today carried Chinese cultural and social norms. To change the curriculum meant to change these cultural and social forms, which involved conflicts between theory and practice, between the discourse of the new curriculum and the direction it signified.

F: Teaching reflects cultural and educational values. In Chinese language arts, memorization is valued as an effective strategy to inherit ancient classic texts and cultural excellence. As learners, we always feel

proud if we can memorize ancient classics or texts. The new curriculum standards and textbooks list the text students need to recite. Learning by memorization is always stressed and valued in practice.

G: Right, memorization is always stereotyped as rote learning. I didn't realize this approach actually carries cultural traditions. The ability of repeating and memorizing ancient text is the symbol of being well-educated and knowledgeable. This cultural value definitely has influence on teaching and learning.

F: This is what I meant the cultural traditions. Some learning and teaching styles such as memorization are rooted in cultural traditions and can't be easily eliminated or changed.

(Fu Laoshi and Researcher (G), Conversation 2: 10-08-2007)

His comments on the cultural value of memorization as pedagogy allowed him to see the deeper issues related to teaching and learning in implementing the new curriculum. As Fu empathized, many teaching and learning strategies such as memorization were not only methodological, but also carried Chinese cultural values and educational traditions. On one hand, the teaching and learning theories embedded in the new curriculum decried memorization as a major learning strategy learnt by students; on the other hand, the new curriculum still prescribed classic poems and selected texts for students to memorize as an approach to value Chinese cultural and educational heritage. What it said and what it directed in the new curriculum represented very contradictory standards

and values and positioned him in dilemmatic situations.

In addition, Fu pointed out Chinese language arts education memorization is considered to be a first step towards learning Chinese characters. The characteristics of Chinese words defined memorization as an important way of learning vocabulary. Fu argued that these cultural dimensions and characteristics were not fully considered and reflected in the new curriculum but as a teacher he had to face these dilemmas without much assistance and guidance. There was a lack of cultural consideration in curriculum reform and implementation, Fu insisted.

Meaning 3: Change efforts are intertwined with pressures and contradictory expectations from students and parents

In describing the contradictory realities, Fu used the concept of humanity advocated by the new curriculum as an example to elaborate his confusion in change.

> *Humanity is a core value in new language arts curriculum. I ponder about this concept almost every day since the new curriculum was adopted. What humanism means in LA education? Many teachers think engaging students into interactive activities is a reflection of humanity, while others present their understanding of this concept through purposeless learning activities. But do teachers have genuine empathy, sympathy, and respect to students? Probably not. The current education system is absolutely not supporting humanity and I think the language in curriculum policy is very superficial and abstract.*

(Fu Laoshi, Conversation 2: 10-08-2007)

His comments indicated the gap between the curriculum document and the local context. For him, humanity is not a superficial phenomenon demonstrated in the changed instructional strategies, but a deep and genuine caring of students as human beings in the learning process. Fu explained his dilemmas on this regard:

> *To respect students and increase their learning autonomy are the key notions of the new curriculum. On one hand, I need to give students the opportunity to explore various learning styles and develop individual thinking skills; On the other hand, I am consistently asked by students to give the right answer or clearer explanation of the text. Sometimes parents even encouraged me to use more strict disciplinary approach so that their kids will follow my instruction. I am like sitting in the middle of a tug-of-war.*
>
> *(Fu Laoshi, Conversation 2: 10-08-2007)*

As a teacher, Fu started to realize the importance of learning autonomy, but what troubled him was how to facilitate learning autonomy when students were still used to traditional learning styles. Keeping himself feeling balanced between students' dependency and independency created new learning demands for him. Change in practice also demanded shared understanding from parents and the community. As indicated by Fu, parents' perceptions on good teaching and education

were distant from what is advocated by the new curriculum. Parent's viewpoints on teaching and learning carried the influence of educational and cultural traditions. Fu didn't explain his role in educating or informing parents about the change but his comments indicated it was an unavoidable issue he had to face.

Meaning 4: Understanding and application of Confucius wisdom facilitates teachers' learning and understanding of the new curriculum

Fu was optimistic about future actions he would take to change towards a better education for his students. He realized the tensions between the new curriculum and other cultural traditions were multi-faceted but these tensions urged him to think critically about the fundamental changes demanded by new curriculum and the drawbacks of current 'traditional' education practice.

F: In China, education outcome is always given the greatest attention. The way to judge education depends on how much knowledge and skills students have received. The new curriculum points to a very different direction. Knowledge is still important, but process, students' attitudes and affections in learning process are equally important. This change is fundamental.

G: Right. Students shouldn't only be evaluated based on the knowledge they acquired. After all not all students will have the opportunities to have good exam results to study in university and college. Those students who don't have the opportunities will need the skills to live their lives as well.

F: When knowledge becomes the only tool to evaluate a person, it causes lots of psychological problems. It's very obvious now in the society.

(Fu Laoshi and Researcher (G), Conversation 3: 14-08-2007)

Fu indicated the excellence and wisdom of Confucius traditions actually had provided solutions to these social and psychological problems but they were neither reflected in current educational practice nor in the new curriculum documents. To confirm his view, he pointed out that the research method I used for this study was actually echoed in the approach Confucius used in his teaching 2000 years ago.

F: Conversation was an important learning style in Confucius teaching. The Analects actually is the record of conversations between Confucius and his disciples. Confucius doesn't view himself as a sage and always sees himself in an equal relationship with his students. These good traditions are not inherited through educational practice. Instead we are doing lots of things opposite to these great thoughts and practice. New curriculum has similarities with our educational traditions. But it somehow indicates learning from the West. I am pretty sure most teachers feel this way too.

G: Learning from western countries is not new in education. How do you feel about learning from other countries?

F: I believe learning brings change. The extreme prosperity of Tang Dynasty in Chinese history was a result of appreciating and integrating other cultures. Teachers at my age are optimistic and open to foreign cultures and ideas. I don't know much about western countries, but obviously they have developed more educational theories. Our education has always associated with politics and there's not much advance in theories and research. We should learn from those who have developed more scientific theories.

(Fu Laoshi, Conversation 3: 14-08-2007)

His emphasis on the western influences on curriculum change implied the great departure of the new curriculum from the old educational values and practice. He was not resistant to learning new theories and improving practice, but felt lost because of the dramatic gap between the new and the old. One issue he identified from the teacher development programs training sessions was that they mainly focused on introducing new theories and analyzing the deficit of traditional education. Advice and guidance on integrating the new theories into practice was absent in training. He found this was the biggest problem in curriculum implementation process. According to Fu, more practical teacher development programs are critical in helping him better understand what should be kept and what could be changed in practice. He expected more facilitation in the *changing by doing* process.

Meaning 5: Experiencing difficulties under the pressure of dual responsibility

Teachers in China, like parents, are very much responsible for good behaviour in students as well as their academic development. A Chinese aphorism "Rearing without education is the fault of the father, teaching

without strictness is the negligence of the teacher". This saying indicates teachers' responsibilities in educating students morally and guiding students' behaviour. The theme of teacher's teaching and moral responsibilities was presented in all three conversations but became intensified in our last one. Fu indicated that these moral and social responsibilities required him to show 'exemplary virtues' for both students and the society in his personal and professional lives and caused great pressure for himself.

> *I've devoted lots of time and energy to my work, but feel very unsatisfied and discouraged with what I did. Society has very high standards and expectations for teachers and the new curriculum makes these standards even higher. First, society still expects teachers to have extensive repertoire knowledge to answer all students' questions and inquires. Second, teachers are expected to be role models in all aspects of their social and professional behaviours. Being a teacher is like being in a holy position which I cannot reach. We are in very embarrassing situations now. The sense of being a teacher is desperate.*
>
> *(Fu Laoshi, Conversation 3: 14-08-2007)*

Fu felt desperate about the tremendous pressures of becoming a teacher while being able to meet the demands of the new curriculum and social expectations. In the process of implementing the new curriculum, Fu was obviously experiencing an identity crisis caused by the conflicts between the socially acceptable authoritarian as *sage on the stage* and the

new curriculum expectations as learning facilitator. Forces controlling his professional identity change are like a tug-of-war, leaving him in the middle to suffer the struggles and unsettledness. Fu longed for more consistent expectations for teachers in the society and community. He commented that depressions caused by this unprecedented education and social change was a common feeling shared by many teachers but these emotional reactions and feelings were rarely considered in the process of curriculum implementation and teacher development. His strong desire of showing sympathetic and empathetic attitude towards students and of realizing humanism in Language Arts teaching was actually inspired by his dissatisfaction with the lack of humanity for teachers in curriculum reform. He noted it was important for him to feel like a normal human being instead of being viewed as *engineer of human souls,* a professional image granted by society devaluing his own emotional and human needs.

Meaning 6: Teachers need a space and opportunity to realize and foster intrinsic motivations to change

Through sharing and reflecting his experience in curriculum change, Fu indicated that our conversations enabled him to speak out the issues he had been wondering about for a long time and to see the interconnectedness of the difficult issues in his practice. Admitting that

new curriculum was directing teaching and learning to a more humanistic educational experience, he stressed teachers' intrinsic motivation to change was very important in curriculum implementation. For him, one of these motivations came from his new understanding of learning and his role and responsibility in facilitating this type of learning.

> *F: Many changes in my practice are superficial. I am friendlier to students and give them more attention in class, but I rarely see things from students' perspectives. Often their thoughts and opinions are not valued as much as mine. I feel struggled about this.*
>
> *G: But you become more conscious about their feelings, needs, and ideas. This is a positive change; and maybe an important changing step for a teacher.*
>
> *F: True. Students are human beings. In the past we just said this so literally, but didn't show this in practice. They belonged to teachers and had to do whatever a teacher asked them to do, (they are) like slaves. Treat students as human beings means I need to respect them, respect their ideas. This conceptual change motivated me to try different things in my practice.*
>
> *(Fu Laoshi and Researcher (G), Conversation 3: 14-08-2007)*

He was very self-critical to his teaching practice and he was able to see how the new understanding of learning had changed his practice. This type of sharing and reflection occurred in our conversations repeatedly and I was convinced that our conversations actually created a space and opportunity for teachers like Fu to connect their educational beliefs and

practice, which was a necessary step for teachers to make any meaningful changes. Although he felt his new understanding about learning was the results of our conversation, the journey towards a new understanding actually began long time before he made any obvious changes in practice. It was the close examination of the complexities of curriculum change helped him make meaningful connections between the words of the new curriculum and his own situations.

CHAPTER 7 THE PEDAGOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF TEACHERS' LIVED EXPERIENCES IN CURRICULUM CHANGE

I don't care if the new curriculum is Chinese or Foreign. Teachers should be like the sea. The lower we position ourselves, the more water we could contain. We should learn from good practice as long as they suit our needs.

SHI LAOSHI, 2007

The essence of the (hermeneutic) question is the opening up, and keeping open, of possibilities.

H. G. GADAMER, 1989

Introduction

This chapter further presents a hermeneutic understanding of the spoken and unspoken dynamics of these teachers' experiences in curriculum change and attempts to demonstrate how such understanding leads us towards an ontologically oriented path in curriculum reform.

Conversing with teachers and reviewing the transcripts of the conversations, I was often moved by their open and enthusiastic attitude towards learning of new ideas, cultures, and traditions. Shi Laoshi, the elementary school principal who has a deep understanding of Chinese wisdom traditions and made satisfying changes in both individual teaching practice and school improvement, repeatedly talked about his

willingness and enthusiasm in embracing learning and change. To me, this enthusiasm sounded like the active lava forming beneath the earth's crust and waiting for the right conditions to erupt. What constitutes the right condition of leading the enthusiasm into a changed practice is the question to which I am inspired to seek answers through this study. While Chinese teachers are seeking to understand themselves and others, how a national curriculum with a global interface sensitively responds to the specific cultural, social, and educational context within which it is located is a collective question to ask by all educators, especially curriculum scholars.

The active process of hearing and interpreting Chinese teachers' existential experiences in change presents the complexity of the curriculum change in China as well as the interconnectedness between new curriculum demands imposed on teachers and the internal dynamics of the change process, between teachers' curriculum understanding and the meaning-making in practice, between difficulties and possibilities, and between teachers' public reactions and private commitment toward change.

A Call for a New Understanding of Curriculum

The *new curriculum reform* has become the most popular words used by teachers, educational administrators, and researchers regarding basic education in China. However, with respect to the necessary question 'what does it mean for teachers to experience a massive curricular change?' and 'what does it mean for China's teachers to engage in such a massive curricular change?' are not easy questions to answer with respect to educator-teacher practices. This study confirms the complexity of both these questions and attempted responses.

As such, as discussed in Chapter One, the Chinese classics (ancient learning) and disciplinary-knowledge prescribed in textbooks have been the focus of teaching during the long history of China. The ultimate goal of teaching is *教书育人* (*teaching the book and cultivate the person)*, which has become a legitimate standard and goal of the teaching profession. In the past, teaching and learning are basically based on two main nation-wide materials: subject teaching syllabi and textbooks. Subject teaching syllabus outlines the teaching outcomes, key concepts, and the content students need to learn and/or memorize. Some subject syllabi, for instance Chinese Language Arts, provide a list of the classic and modern texts students

need to memorize in its appendix. Textbooks, which are developed on the subject syllabi and nationally standardized, are the *bible* of teaching and learning and expected to be strictly followed by both teachers and students. This educational practice shapes Chinese teachers' understanding about curriculum: textbook refers to curriculum and textbook change equals curriculum change. This is not an uncommon understanding held by most teachers. Conversations as held within this study reveal that curriculum is a much contested concept for many Chinese teachers.

The *New Curriculum* officially authorizes Chinese teachers with the freedom and flexibility of using a variety of materials to achieve the learning outcomes. However, such freedom and flexibility has not been well recognized and appreciated by teachers. Because the student evaluation system has not been changed yet, the focus of teaching and learning is still very much on getting good exam scores, being selected into schools with reputations for academic excellence, and passing the national entrance exam for universities. This situation is in contradiction with the new curriculum philosophy - *for each student's development* - but is confirmed by Wan Laoshi in our last conversation:

I teach Chinese Language Arts. ...The ultimate goal of (my) teaching is to improve the exam score. I am teaching Grade 10 now, and will teach the same classes till they graduate from Grade 12. My goal is to improve students' score in National Entrance Exam.

(Wan Laoshi, Conversation 3, Aug. 15, 2007)

Wan's statement reminds us that curriculum understanding in Chinese context is entangled with traditional educational practices: textbooks, exam-based selection and evaluation system, and centralized curriculum development. Schwab (1969) emphasizes that in any curriculum change, the four curriculum commonplaces – students, teachers, subject matters, and milieu – have to be properly coordinated, because changes in any one will have consequences for the others. While the commonplaces of the old Chinese curriculum - passive learning of students, authoritarian teaching style, subject textbooks, and exam-orientated educational environment - are still in place in practices, it must be acknowledged that educational practices cannot be changed dramatically without a teacher forming new understandings of curriculum and its commonplaces. This is not only a task faced by all teachers going through this massive curricular change; it is also a task that has to be fulfilled by the entire educational system in China.

The *new curriculum reform* is undertaking based on traditional

curriculum concepts - curriculum standards, objectives, design, implementation, evaluation, and administration – and signifies the characteristics of 'an era of curriculum development' before 1969 (Pinar, 1995). In his book *Understanding Curriculum*, Pinar (1995) emphasizes the need to understand curriculum untraditionally and declares that the field of curriculum has shifted from the time of curriculum development to an era of curriculum understanding. Two decades later, this statement still sounds too optimistic in the context of China. Curriculum implementation process and teachers training sessions on curriculum reform described by teachers in this study revealed that a new understanding of curriculum has not been formed in China. This phenomenon has not gained much concern either in both educational research and practices. Contemporary curriculum literature, which is mainly developed by Western scholars, cannot fully address the unique issues regarding curriculum understanding in Chinese context. The shifting curriculum landscape in China calls for an urgent need of re-conceptualizing curriculum in China. Such a call entails examining how curriculum understanding formed in this specific context has shaped the current educational practice and to what extend Chinese teachers can form new curriculum understanding. This, no doubt, will indicate the scope and direction of change in teaching

and learning.

To form a new understanding of curriculum might be a long journey for many Chinese teachers; however, this journey is necessary and critical for Chinese educators and those who work with them. Without critically examining who Chinese teachers are, in terms of how they live their teaching identities, and how contextual factors, such as adherence to textbooks and exams, influence teachers' curriculum understandings, it would be impossible to change educational practices in China.

At a time when Western educational thoughts and practice are employed in international development programs as strategies to help developing countries like China achieve educational equality and social justice, a critical examination on how these educational thoughts and practices are understood and reflected in different cultural, social, educational, and historical contexts is a desirable project to carry on in the fields of curriculum studies, education change, and international development. New understandings of (in) transferability of educational thoughts and practices cross boarders emerging from such scholarly and professional efforts will enable us to see what we have in common between the east and west and become sensitive in introducing new educational theories and practices from one context to another. Such

understandings will also enable us to create inclusive learning environments for both students and teachers and appreciate the diverse educational values and wisdoms developed from different social and cultural contexts.

The Need of Forming New Relationship with Curriculum

Traditionally, Chinese teachers are *consumers* of curriculum and required to strictly follow the teaching *manual* – subject syllabi and textbooks – in teaching practices. The curriculum goals, resources, strategies, and evaluation plans are all prescribed by Ministry of Education through the syllabi, textbooks, and standardized tests. Teachers are not required to get involved in setting curriculum goals and learning outcomes, designing and using other resources than textbooks, translating curriculum based on local contexts and students' situations, nor in employing diverse evaluation strategies. The purpose of teaching is transmitting the knowledge from the textbook to students and making sure students to memorize such content in order to pass the exams. Students' backgrounds and experiences are rarely an important factor teachers need to consider in lesson planning and classroom instruction.

Such educational practices are still pervasive in schools, as revealed in

conversations held in this study. However, they are greatly challenged by the new curriculum. The new curriculum demands Chinese teachers to change from *consumers* to *interpreters* and authorizes them the 'freedom' to translate the national curriculum into their practices based on local contexts. According to the 'new curriculum', teachers cannot simply follow the *curriculum-as-plan* anymore but have to simultaneously give attention to the *curriculum-as-lived* (Aoki, 1986/1991/2005).

According to Canadian curriculum theorist Ted T. Aoki, curriculum-as-plan refers to one developed by curriculum experts under the direction of Ministry of Education divisions and intended for implementation in classes and schools. It frames a set of curriculum policy, statements and subject standards, including curriculum goals and objectives, what teachers and students should do, official and recommended resources for teachers and students, and rationales of curriculum administration and evaluation. Curriculum-as-lived refers to the living presence of people, pedagogy, and unique situations. It is the face-to-face situation that is lived by teachers, the living busyness in teachers' personal and professional lives, the pressures from numerous standard tests and administrative tasks, and students' unique life experiences and individual needs.

The massive curriculum reform in China asks teachers to give a hearing to both worlds - curriculum-as-plan and curriculum-as-lived - simultaneously. As opposed to faithfully following the content and instruction on textbooks and syllabus in their previous teaching, Chinese teachers are required to creatively interpret the nation-wide curriculum standards in local situations and contexts. They are also expected to locate the curriculum content in the life experience of students to cultivate authentic problem solving and creative thinking skills. This demands teachers to establish a new relationship with curriculum and brings insecurity and ambiguity to teachers because such relationship is totally absent from their former educational practices.

Challenges ar tremendous for those teachers in Western China, where they have very few professional learning resources and training opportunities for innovative pedagogy and leadership support. Teacher participants, who received distance education materials, attended participatory training on student-centered instruction, and gained follow-up support from CIDA SCBEWC project, realized that absolute fidelity to the 'curriculum-as-plan' was neither workable nor desirable. With the continuous encouragement and systematic support they received, these teachers were able to interpret the new curriculum creatively based

on location situations and gradually shape a new relationship with the curriculum, students, and curriculum resources. Such relationship leads to many positive changes in their educational philosophy and teaching practices.

Those teachers who participated in traditional training sessions, which were either completely "theory-based lectures" (Wan, 2007, conversation 3) or "divorced from reality" (Zhang, 2007, conversation 2), followed a linear movement in copying curriculum-as-plan into their teaching practices and believed they should faithfully apply whatever they learned from training workshops into local situations. These teachers quite frequently experienced disappointment, failure, dissatisfaction, and loss in practice and eventually turn to the old ways of teaching.

Living in a zone between curriculum-as-plan and curriculum-as-lived creates tensionality but also provides Chinese teachers opportunities for growing into teaching *architects* from teaching *smiths*. It also means that teachers live simultaneously with limitations and with openness, and with risks and with possibilities. This tensionality calls on teachers to 'make time for meaningful striving and struggling, time for letting things be, time for questions, time for singing, time for crying, time for anger, time for praying and hoping (Aoki, 1991/2005, p. 164). When teachers live

thusly, there is call issued to curriculum policy makers, developers, administrators, and teacher educators to be sensitive to teachers' needing time in curriculum implementation, to reach understandings and to make accommodations. And, teachers need to be alert to the possibilities of the pedagogic touch, tact, and attunement in their work and refuse the seduction of lofty and prosaic talk in the language of conceptual abstractions. Only by turning to an understanding of the need of forming a new relationship with curriculum and conducting meaningful dialogue between curriculum-as-plan and curriculum-as-lived, teachers and those who work for and with them at all levels, can contribute to fresh understandings of curriculum implementation and develop a deeply conscious sensitivity to what this change means to Chinese teachers.

Conflicts between Roles and Identity

The curriculum reform in China is not only about changes in the forms of, contents of, and the administration of curriculum, but also about changes in how Chinese society sees education and how students and teachers view themselves. The change asks teachers to re-examine their roles and identities. Talking about the relationship between role and identity and their relations, Britzman (1994) says:

> Role speaks to public function, whereas identity voices subjective investments and commitments. Role, or what one is supposed to do, and identity, or what one believes and thinks, are often at odds. (p. 59)

According to Britzman (1994), it is very problematic to simply talk about teachers' roles without giving voice to their identities because role and identity have very different but dialogic influence in the discursive educational and social practice of teachers. Educational researchers ((Britzman, 1994; Carson, 2006; Richardson, 2003; Smith, 1996) who investigate the dynamics of pre-service and in-service teacher's learning have confirmed that teacher identity is a very important topic and needs to be investigated and discussed with teachers because it mirrors teachers' subjective investment and commitment toward change. Numerous articles on the new Chinese curriculum discuss about the urgency and necessity for teachers to change their roles but neglected the topic of teacher identity.

Currently, what is publically discussed in articles in China is what are the new teaching roles required by the new curriculum and why teachers should change their roles. The emphasis in changing teachers' role is reflected in my conversations with teacher participants in this study because all of these teachers described how they were gradually changing

their roles and how difficult this process was.

An in-depth interpretation of teachers' remarks and comments on teaching roles reveals their frustration about the tensions between roles and identities. As Fu Laoshi, the Language Arts teacher and Leader of Youth League in junior high school, reflected in our third conversation, traditional metaphors for teacher's role, such as *人类灵魂的工程师* (ren lei ling hun de gong cheng shi, *Engineer of human souls*), *辛勤的园丁* (xin qin de yuan ding, *diligent gardener*), *燃烧的蜡烛* (ran shao de la zhu, burning candle), bring not much pride but a lot irony and suppressants to him. Fu was frustrated because he has become these assumed roles, which neglect and suppress his identity. These metaphors imply that those who work hard and maintain traditional moral standards will be *good teachers*; however, teachers who assume these roles cannot claim they are *good teachers* anymore because the new curriculum demands very different roles for teachers. In addition to being moral role models of students, teachers are expected to assume the roles of learning facilitator, curriculum developer, teacher researcher, life-long learner, and the ones who have the pedagogic tact of inspiring students' collaborative, creative, and inquiry learning. Without long-term investment and commitment, making such change in teachers' roles does not likely happen. Therefore,

hermetically speaking, Fu's frustration towards the traditional metaphors of teachers' roles is derived from his resentment about the fact that his investment and commitment in making the change is unrecognized and unappreciated. His situation indicates that there is a need of attending to teachers' identity as well as the underestimated tensions between role and identity in education change process.

The multifaceted tensions between teacher's role and identity are well captured and described in some new metaphors created by teachers (Yin & Cao, 2008). *文学上的圣职与实际上的卑职 - literary holy profession and practical humble profession* - implies the mismatch between the official image of teaching profession and the teaching profession lived by teacher themselves. *理想的完人与实际的凡人* – a *perfectionist in fantasized world and a normal person in reality* - indicates the distance between a teacher's educational role highly expected by society and his/her own sense if being a normal and common citizen. *理性的强者和感性的弱者 - the rationally strong and the emotionally weak* – describes the situations in which teachers are theoretically trained and prepared but emotionally vulnerable in the face of the dramatic change. These descriptive phrases created by teachers mark the tensions they have experienced in curriculum reform and indicate a call for critically examining the conflicts between role and

identity in China.

Teacher Identity as an Emerging Concept

As a Chinese national who has immersed herself in Western academic environments and educational literature during the past seven years, understanding what identity means has been both de-empowering and empowering. The de-empowerment comes from becoming a minority in a society dominated by majority white and (post)constructivism/ (post)colonialism -based educational thoughts and practice. The empowerment comes from the social, cultural, and educational cultural transformation through struggles of identifying who I am and who they are, from seeing self as an agent of my own destiny. The process of my understanding and forming a new identity is characterized by *displacement*, the uneasiness of being separated from Chinese culture through physical dislocation and the loss of moving from familiar to unfamiliar pedagogic orientations and learning environments.

During my conversations with teachers in this study, I shared my learning and working experience abroad with teacher participants because their remarks frequently reminded me that their experiences in curriculum reform were also characterized by *displacement*, the separation

between traditional teaching philosophy *传道，授业，解惑*- explain philosophy/idea, impart knowledge, and resolve doubts – and the new one demanded by the new curriculum - teaching *for every student's development* and teaching as the facilitation of learning. Many new concepts embedded in this new teaching philosophy are developed in the Western world and sound very foreign to these teachers. To these teachers, it seems like every component of education has to be changed and it is difficult to find the starting point or the core of this massive change.

Teachers in this study indicate their capabilities, experiences, and pedagogic wisdoms accumulated through prior educational practices are undervalued. They long for meaningful ways to maintain their self-esteem in new personal and professional identities and to deal with the conflicts between the new roles established by the new curriculum and their identities rooted deeply in traditions. Consciously and unconsciously, they constantly reflect and examine who they are, what they can do within the current school and social structure, and how much they would like to invest in implementing the new curriculum.

In China, a society characterized by its strong collective social culture with a very long history, identity has always been defined as being collective instead of individual, and implies different meanings from the

one formed in the context of contemporary Western Europe and North America. The word *I* was rarely heard during my conversations with teachers who usually referred to *we* or the general term *teachers*, even though he/she was talking about his/her own experience and feelings. This phenomenon makes me realize that teachers' need of maintaining a collective identity cannot be ignored and devalued, as it reflects the cultural and social traditions. However, it is equally important to recognize that the emphasis of collective teaching identity comes at a cost of suppressing teachers' individual needs, wants, and desires. This reality causes intolerable contradictions between what they are expected to do and what they want to do as teachers. Two teacher participants of this study indicated that they quite often repressed their desires of trying some innovative instructional strategies because they were concerned about their colleagues' negative reactions and criticism. One teacher expressed that she was compelled to arrange after-school tutoring time for students even though she did not want to, because several other teachers did so.

Teachers' reflection on their identities and the displacement caused by the new curriculum signify that teacher identity is becoming a more and more important educational concept in China. Caring and thoughtful pedagogical tact and an in-depth understanding about Chinese

educational context might be the path towards future development of this concept in China.

Rethinking Resistance to Change

In order to make the changes required by the new curriculum, teachers need to unlearn the old strategies they have previously learned and relearn to teach in a new way. This constitutes "difficult knowledge" characterized by "intersecting philosophical, pedagogical, and methodological dilemmas" (Pitt & Britzman, 2003, p. 755). These dilemmas are very upsetting, disturbing, and discomforting as common understandings of teaching and learning are disturbed and challenged.

Through conversations with teachers, I came to appreciate teachers' encounter with 'difficult knowledge' and how complex this engagement is. Part of what the engagement with difficult knowledge looks like teachers' defensive actions in the process of change because they are concerned about exposing professional inadequacies in teaching the new curricula. These defensive actions are often referred as *resistance to change*, an obstacle to be inevitably overcome by traditional literature on and strategies in educational change (Carson, 2003). In this section I suggest rethinking teachers' resistance to change and argue that resistance as the

results of unlearning is a necessary and desirable precondition of change and learning.

Learning to teach in a different way is a dynamic process and has to do with something other than the material of pedagogy and curriculum (Britzman, 1994). In this learning process, it is normal for teachers to desire comforting repetition of normative knowledge, identities, and experiences, particularly when this knowledge, identity, and experience are still accepted and expected by society and community. Any change of these aspects involves depression, loss, and pressure of the ego. Resistance is an ego defence that is against the anxiety of confusion, loss, and pressure and largely unconscious. As indicated by one teacher participant, Zhang Laoshi, his resistance to change comes from his concerns of not being able to maintain his professional identity and dignity as a qualified teacher. The resistance also comes from his confusions about the new educational terminologies introduced by the new curriculum. After discussing these dynamics involved in his learning process, he felt quite relieved and promised to find solutions for these factors lingering in his mind in future teaching. This example passes us the message that teachers need to understand the dynamics involved in resistance to change in order to develop the pedagogy corresponding to resistance.

Psychoanalytic theory has a lot to offer in rethinking teachers' resistance to change because it focuses on how we are consciously and unconsciously complicit in the creation of our own realities and begins with the problem of resistance to discourse (Pitt & Britzman, 2003; Taubman, 2007). The mainstream approaches in implementing new curriculum, which focus on providing adequate and proper curriculum materials, resources, leadership, structure, and programs to teachers, aim to overcome teachers' resistance to new rationale, knowledge, and practice but quite often lead teachers into situations of repeating their prior history of learning and teaching in the guise of new curriculum and strategies. Psychoanalytic theory leads us to look into the unconscious forces within teachers themselves and question how these forces affect their interactions with the new curriculum, students, and the meanings they give to their experiences. In addition, psychoanalytic theory offers critical insights in understanding the ontological difficulties in curriculum change and how resistance to change should be teachable moments to map teachers' emotional and psychical struggles in implementing the new curriculum.

From a psychoanalytic perspective, teachers' resistance to the new curriculum and educational change involves a more profound emotional and psychic dynamics than what they can show in their practice. During

this massive curriculum change, Chinese teachers are constantly involved in re-examining and troubling their repetitive practice and their preconceived notions of what it means to teach and what it means to learn. Embracing change involves recognizing one's resistance and confronting it as a source of personal and professional change. Psychoanalytic review of resistance will enable teachers to realize and work through resistance rather than to avoid and eliminate it. By consciously tracing the history of their identity and acknowledging their prejudices in practice, teachers can generate opportunity and space for themselves to work through the turbulent struggles before proceeding with the more challenging demands of the new curriculum. This type of learning is absent in contemporary teacher educational practices, but perhaps the most necessary component in both pre-service and in-service teacher education curricula.

Understanding teachers' resistance to change through psychoanalytic perspective is critical for teachers because such learning not only increases their awareness of not repeating the inappropriate old teaching practice, but also enables them to confront the discomforting process of forming new identities and practice.

Curriculum as a Conversation between East and West

The topics about Western educational values and Chinese cultural and educational traditions were consistently returned to in the conversations conducted in this study. Although comparison between the Chinese educational values and systems of education and those in the other parts of the world was not a focus of this study, it became an unavoidable topic in most of the discussions because all participants had strongly experienced a cultural displacement caused by the national curriculum, which thus defined as being New, Western, or foreign. However, most participants did interpret the new curriculum as western in origin.

Through conversations with teachers, I found that they were critically alert to the deficiency and oppressive nature of current educational practice and values reflected in the old curriculum. They saw the need of reform. They saw that integration of new ideas into practice has brought positive changes in their students, which became a key motivation for them to embark on a new and challenging learning journey. They desired to learn new subject content and pedagogy, to learn to shift attention from textbooks to students, to learn or relearn a new relation between the 'self' and the 'other', and to learn what to keep and what to reject. In the

process of constant confronting self and other, they experienced curriculum change as a very complex process instead of a simple one-way adaptation of new curriculum standards and terms into the dominant educational norm. In order to develop the new and to discard the old pedagogic actions, they are trying to make connections between the indigenous cultural values and educational traditions and the new ones introduced by new curriculum policy, documents, and teacher education and development programs.

Shi Laoshi, the elementary school principal, repeatedly stated that an in-depth understanding of Chinese wisdom traditions enabled him to connect the new concepts with his prior experiences and to understand the deep root of his identity of being a Chinese teacher and learner. His knowledge about and interest in Chinese philosophical traditions enabled him to explore much deeper and broader issues related to curriculum change. The holistic world view embedded in Chinese wisdom traditions shifted his efforts from mastering new strategies to solve certain problems in curriculum implementation to acquiring a bigger picture of complex relationships involved in change and then to promoting the well beings of students and teachers as a school principal.

Shi Laoshi's comments and reflections inspired me to read more

Chinese classics through this study. Chinese wisdom traditions emphasize the wholeness and change, recognize contradiction and the need for multiple perspectives, and advocate for searching 中庸之道 (the Middle Way) between opposing propositions. These cognitive approaches deeply rooted in Chinese wisdom traditions made it possible for teachers like Shi Laoshi to critically review the new educational philosophy and theories and to embrace the excellence of the *foreig'*, which many of his colleagues found *good but not applicable*. The presence of Chinese educational and philosophical wisdoms, based on my interpretation of teachers' remarks in conversations, will not only show the roots of teachers' educational values, attitudes, and positions, but also create an interpretive space in which they find resonance with their identity and make it easier for them to embrace the freedom of honouring or rejecting *the other* based on own situations.

The new Chinese curriculum reflects how curriculum, which used to be confined within a nation's border, is being greatly influenced and shaped by other values and traditions in this increasingly interconnected world. Reflecting tremendous Western educational values and practice but being implemented in an educational system with its own unique philosophical, historical, and cultural roots, the new Chinese curriculum provides us an unprecedented opportunity and domain to engage in

transnational conversations on how curriculum can facilitate teaching and learning sensitive to multiple modes of reasoning, worldviews, and cultures and at the same time increase mutual understanding when education is becoming more and more interconnected and influenced by other part of the world. The constant shifts between self/east and other/west I experienced during the course of this study made me believe that this large-scale curriculum reform that is being undertaking in China should not simply be the content of transnational conversations, but be valued as a significant domain for conversations between East and West, between different cultural and educational traditions. At a time internationalization of curriculum studies has become a shared interest and concern in the field of curriculum studies, such a space is not only necessary, but also critical for meaningful discussions on how to appreciate and connect ourselves with these diverse ways of knowing and being in a more harmonious, peaceful way.

Teacher participant Shi Laoshi reflected that Chinese philosophical traditions served as unique lenses for him to understand the complexity and contradictions reflected in the curriculum implementation. He used 仁 (*virtue*), a Confucian principle of the basic norm governing relations between human beings, to elaborate the contributions of Chinese wisdom

traditions to curriculum understanding and implementation. 仁 *(virtue)* emphasizes harmony, peace, and coexistence. Based on this principle, East and West are not viewed as culturally and politically opposed forces, but be viewed as co-existing ways of being and knowing things. This cognitive thinking orientation was reflected and emphasized by the teacher participants who were able to make many positive changes in their practice. This viewpoint helped them develop an ability to think critically about eastern and western curriculum and cultural traditions, and to expand their own horizons of curriculum and education. In this way they were able to transform knowledge-out-of-context contained in the curriculum-as-plan into knowledge-in-action in a creative way, and to accept and appreciate the challenges caused by philosophical, cultural, and pedagogical diversities in the new curriculum.

CHAPTER 8 TOWARDS MORE THOUGHTFUL CURRICULUM IMPLEMENTATION IN CHINA

According to the new Professional and Curriculum Standards, teachers cannot simply be teaching smiths, but should know how to dialogue with and listen to students, to respect students' right of learning, and to teach students to converse with parents, society, and themselves.

Q. ZHONG, 2007

I have read some books on new curriculum and attended a few training sessions. However, I cannot fully understand the content of the books and the concepts introduced during the training. I found it almost not possible for me to apply the new knowledge into practice.

LI LAOSHI, 2007

A great scholar has the capacity to accommodate all matters big and small like the ocean accepts the waters from rivers and streams.

CHINESE PROVERB

Introduction

In curriculum reform, teachers are firstly challenged to respond with new skills, pedagogical wisdom, and imagination. They are required to become thoughtful and tactful pedagogues with the capacity of thinking, introspection, reflecting, accepting and appreciating the complexity of the new curriculum and its application to their situations. For Chinese teachers, who are traditionally trained and developed in an examination

driven and competitively selective atmosphere under an elitist education system, these changes are not easy and natural, but have to be deliberately guided and sought in both pre-service and in-service teacher education programs.

Walking on Two Legs in Teacher Education

The current curriculum reform calls for the concurrent reform of both pre-service and in-service teacher education in China. The striking issue emerging from this massive curriculum change is that many pre-service teacher education programs and curricula have not been changed to prepare future teachers to deal with the new demands and challenges brought by the new school curriculum. Studies conducted in China in recent years strongly suggested the improvement of current pre-service teacher education programs (Li and Chen, 2002; Goo, 2002; Song, 2008) in order to meet the new demands of the dramatically changing teaching profession. The new educational philosophy, new disciplines and disciplinary content, and learner-centered pedagogy explicitly addressed in the new basic education curriculum have not been, but must be, incorporated into pre-service teacher education curriculum so that pre-service teachers will be prepared to form new understandings about

curriculum and education, to teach in a new way different from the one they learned through prior learning experiences, to create supporting learning environment for students, and to have the opportunities of interpreting what they learn in real teaching contexts before they enter into the turbulent world of education changes. "New teachers become unqualified as soon as they enter into teaching profession," the statement made by one of the principal participant (Shi Laoshi, 2007) in this study, indicates not only the concerns about the quality of new teachers, but also the urgency and importance of reforming pre-service teacher education in China, especially in this historical moment of nation-wide curriculum reform. It won't be an easy task because of the politics and the number of institutions will be involved, but it is a task that cannot be delayed or neglected in this massive education change.

Pre-service teacher preparation and in-service teacher development are the two legs teacher education in China has to walk on in approaching the destination of the long march of this new education reform. Walking on two legs, a political term used in China in 1958 for simultaneous industrial and agricultural developments, vividly depicts the parallel situations of pre-service and in-service teacher education in China. Ignoring either leg will cause the reform to be disabled and ultimately to

fail.

Identity Transformation as Facilitation of Change

While there is a substantial amount of literature that discusses the construction of teacher identity in the western context, the literature on teacher identity in China is very limited. The notion of teacher identity has been a very contested and confusing concept that I have tried to reveal in this study, not only because there are different Chinese terms (*教师身份/教师身份认同/教师职业身份认同*) for this discourse, but also because the political, social, and cultural contexts in which Chinese teachers constructed their identity is very different from the one in the Western world, where most modern identity literature is developed. In the past, teacher identity was not an outstanding issue in Chinese education, where identity and role are viewed as the same. The popular phenomenon of discussing the new roles teachers are expected to take based on the new curriculum policy reveals a lack of awareness and understanding of how identity differs from role.

As noted by Li (2008), teacher identity has only recently emerged as a subtopic in Chinese education because many challenging issues associated with curriculum change are closely related to teacher identity. This is

confirmed by the conversations with teachers in this study. Although teacher participants frequently mentioned that their teaching roles formed through prior educational experiences were greatly challenged by the new curriculum and they needed to form new roles, these teachers spent more time sharing their concerns, desires, feelings, disturbed well-being during curriculum implementation, and excitement after making positive changes in practices. They all admitted that it demands tremendous commitment from them to assume the new teaching roles defined by the new curriculum. However, such tremendous commitment is either unrecognized or taken for granted in the process of curriculum implementation. Voices on frustrations, excitement, concerns, and challenges these six teacher participants experienced in curriculum reform indicate an urgent need for better understanding teacher identity in Chinese context and the necessity of recognizing teacher identity as an important discourse in facilitating teachers' learning and motivating teachers' change.

A recurring identity issue brought up by teacher participants in this study was what it means to be a good teacher. Traditionally, a good teacher is the one who can teach the book and cultivate the person (*教书育人*) , have teachers' authority and dignity (*师道尊严*), and assume the role

as a substitute father (一日为师，终生为父). A good teacher is also defined as one who is willing to sacrifice him/herself for students (燃烧自己，照亮别人). Shaped by these educational traditions, teacher participants in this study expressed great psychological struggles in transforming their identities during curriculum implementation.

During the conversations of this study, teacher participants and I had the opportunity to discuss the contradictory realities between who they were and who they were asked to become. By confronting and critiquing the controversial aspects between traditional roles and the new ones demanded by the new curriculum, these teachers indicated that they became more aware of the internal and external factors supporting or constraining the change of their discursive educational practices. They also indicated that they would take more responsibilities in changing towards improved educational practices.

An interpretive understanding of teachers' remarks makes me realize that separating teacher identity from teachers' roles is a necessary step in helping them understand the cause of the most difficult issues in curriculum change– identity transformation. As an indicator of teachers' internal investment and commitment, teacher identity should be differentiated from teachers' roles, which represent external expectations

and professional standards for teachers. As a powerful mediator in facilitating teachers' change, teacher identity needs to be paid much more attention in educational research and practices in China.

Learning from Chinese Wisdom Traditions

Having experienced, observed, and conversed about the complex problems and issues emerging in this unprecedented large-scale curriculum change, I am evoked to look at all the educational endeavours associated with this reform beyond a preoccupation with learning new knowledge and gaining more power. I become more concerned with "the fundamental educational question of how we might learn to live alone and with others and contend with our personal and social suffering" (Eppert & Wang, 2008, p. xx) through 道 (the way) reflected in Chinese wisdom traditions, which intimately shapes Chinese teachers, students, and their perceptions and reactions toward change.

Inspired by teacher participants' comments on Chinese wisdom traditions, I turned my attention to finding connections between Chinese wisdoms traditions and curriculum understanding. For instance, Confucianism's emphasis on 中庸之道 (the middle way), reminds us to recognize strengths of both educational systems– the East and the West –

and to seek a balance in integrating these strengths based on local situations. Taoism's advocacy on 道 (way) directs us to attend to *human spirit* instead of plans, strategies, and technologies in curriculum implementation; Taoist philosophy offers many helpful insights for this large scale curriculum change. The Taoist concept of 布白 *(blank space)* emphasizes the importance of creating space for curriculum interpretation; 体悟 *(physical comprehension)* states the importance of creating experiential learning opportunities for students; 无为 *(doing nothing)* indicates the path of shifting curriculum management into curriculum leadership. Buddhist wisdom leads us towards a holistic perspective of the complex dynamics in curriculum change as well as to "the wisdom about attachment, compassion, impermanence, no-self, and the significance of in-significance" (Eppert , 2008, p.91). All these wisdom traditions attend to ethics and compassion and help us understand and live with the challenges, issues, and possibilities in dramatic education change.

Conversations about the curriculum reform in this study exemplify a domain to explore ways of mutual learning and appreciation between East and West. Understandings emerging from these conversations reveal that Chinese cultural and educational values are not only distinct from but also on an equal footing with Western cultural and educational values. The

creation of space for critical dialogue about cultural and educational values in Eastern and Western curriculum understanding is a significant indication of mutual recognition and engagement, which starts "before the dawn of the first millennium of the Common Era" (Smith, 2008, p. 2) but has not acquired a mainstream presence in contemporary Western society because of the endemic Eurocentrism and insularity of Western intellectual life within public life and scholarly work (Clarke, 1997; Eppert & Wang, 2008). Jardine (2008) emphasizes such space and conversations are pedagogical because

> We don't listen to others simply in order to understand them; we listen to others also in order to understand ourselves, because others can read our lives, and our deafness and blindness, back to us in ways that we cannot read them alone (p. xii).

The perspective gained from the conversations of this study enables me to re-envision frameworks and means for facilitating teachers' difficult transitions to deeper levels of being, knowing, and engagement. New understandings I gained from this study inspire me to engage more profoundly and meaningfully in the oriental/occidental conversation in the future and remind me to become highly aware of cultural supremacy and oppression embedded in a global curriculum agenda. With the openness to what lies beyond our current understanding of curriculum

and then integrating the new understanding creatively into our prior practices, I believe cross-border conversations on curriculum can be a powerful source for equity and social justice, helping disparate people and new generations learn to live together peacefully and to build a harmonious world in which citizens of any nation could feel at home everywhere. Hopefully, such conversations will ultimately lead us to

> a life more tolerant of cultural and ethnic differences, more at ease with things not immediately understood, more patient in dealing with life's essential difficulties and more hungry for a simple love of the world itself as our earthly home.
>
> (Smith, 2006, p. 9)

Towards a Thoughtful Teacher Education in China

Teacher participants in this study repeated frequently that in order to improve teaching practices they need to make meaningful connections between the new and the old, between the foreign and the indigenous, between the prescribed standards and their local situations. In order to grow the competency for visioning, reflecting, and improving teaching and learning in their own situations, they desired to be guided and facilitated through the course of professional development.

In the face of the imposed changes, most of these teachers indicated

that they tended to retain strong allegiances to their prior identity - knowledge vassal and transmitter, authority in class, father-like mentor of students, exam-based teaching, curriculum technician - which gave them credibility, knowledge, and skills in *'good'* teaching. In making transition to new way of teaching - learning partner and facilitator, democratic relationships with students, inquiry-based learning, teaching for students' personal development - which involves more than the simple acquisition of new skills and knowledge, these teachers have experienced misunderstandings and ambiguity towards the new curriculum at various levels. A few of them who have received appropriate and systematic support in changing the current educational practices clearly emphasized the importance of such support in making transformative changes in both educational philosophies and practices.

Teacher participants of this study offered diverse comments on the professional development opportunities made available to them. Three of them were not satisfied with the quality and quantity of the teacher training sessions in which they participated because these sessions were basically one-shot workshops and lectures. These workshops, though well intentioned, were perceived by these three teachers as fragmented, disconnected, and irrelevant to the real problems and challenges of

classroom practices. In addition, the test-based professional development on the new curriculum stimulated their resistance towards the new curriculum because the challenges they encountered in practices were not acknowledged in these PD activities.

The other three teachers who were satisfied with the training opportunities made available to them and have made very positive changes in teaching practices have been involved in CIDA project trainings on student-centered pedagogy and similar participatory training sessions offered through other national and international projects. They explained that instructors of these sessions modeled the educational philosophy and strategies advocated by the new curriculum. The well-designed learning activities and reflections provided consistent experiential learning opportunities about the new educational concepts and theories. Their experiences of learning to be active and collaborative in classroom engagement enabled them to see issues and difficulties their students encountered in the process of curriculum change. And what was critically important for them was that they were continuously reminded that the new knowledge and skills they gained from training were not general formulae for good teaching practices, but have to be tried and applied based on their specific contexts. They were encouraged by teacher

educators to develop practical wisdom in (un)learning and (un)accepting the new knowledge and skills based on their situated contexts.

These six teachers' different reactions towards teacher education and development programs invite us to rethink teachers' relationship to knowledge and attend to the value of practical wisdom in teacher education. A teacher with practical wisdom is not a mechanic, but a creator with imaginative insight (Doll et. al., 2005). Helping such teachers emerge and develop, based on my interpretation of teachers' remarks, requires the pedagogy of stimulating teachers' practical wisdom. It is not the pedagogy of mimesis (coping), but the pedagogy of practice wherein the practice is not mere repetition but the practice of doing, reflecting, visioning, and doing yet again with a difference. These six teachers' various attitudes to and experiences in professional development programs remind us how critical a thoughtful teacher education program is for Chinese teachers, especially for those who do not have access to resources other than the limited mandatory training hours.

Imagining New Discourses in Chinese Curriculum Studies

Interpreting the meanings of curriculum reform and writing them in this dissertation in English as my second language was a challenging,

sometimes painful process, in which I often encountered unmatchable discourses between Chinese and English languages, unbridgeable differences between the change context in China and those in other parts of world, between the spirit of original words and my capacity of making it understandable in a non-Chinese context, and vice versa. However, I realized these challenges are not simply limitations, but also opened up possibilities of imagining and creating new educational discourses in China.

Curriculum Interpretation （课程阐释）

My interpretive experiences in assisting Chinese teachers to understand the new curriculum standards in international development training sessions and in conversations with six teacher participants made me believe *curriculum interpretation* should be an important discourse in both teacher education programs and curriculum implementation process in China. The new curriculum brings Chinese teachers many new teaching and learning about philosophies, terms, and contents, which require them to construct new understandings about teaching, learning, the subjects, and pedagogical relationships. I found that to be able to translate all these new understandings into practice, Chinese teachers not only need training

and resources on the new theories and philosophy, but also need a systemic support and guidance in interpreting what they've learnt in educational practices. If the discourse of *curriculum interpretation* is not appreciated and emphasized in teacher education and curriculum implementation, it is not likely that teachers will get the support they need to translate the new curriculum and make the changes in practice.

Two teacher participants who participated in CIDA trainings sessions on Student Centered Instruction repeatedly expressed their appreciation of the structured project support they received in translating the new curriculum into pedagogic actions suitable to local situations. However, this type of support was only offered to a limited number of project schools and teachers in Western China and its positive impact on new curriculum implementation has not been fully recognized by and disseminated to a broader scope. The typical rationale underpinning teacher education and training for curriculum change in China is to provide them some theory-based training sessions and expect them to change their discursive practice within a very short period of time. As disclosed by some teacher participants in this study, this approach in fact disguised the gap between the new curriculum and their actual situations and increased their doubt whether it is possible to implement the new

curriculum in local context at all. It is also consistent with traditional Chinese views of the relationship between the curricula and teaching. Therefore, it is especially important in the Chinese context to establish *curriculum interpretation* as an important concept because it will lay a legitimate ground for teachers to use creativity and imagination in curriculum implementation and encourage them to relate the new curriculum policies, standards, contents, structure to their specific situations and local conditions instead of feeling they can or have to faithfully follow a prescribed model in curriculum implementation.

Curriculum wisdom （课程智慧）

Curriculum wisdom is another discourse occupying my mind since the beginning of this study through which I endeavoured to understand how Chinese education and teachers' understanding about curriculum, teaching, and learning have been shaped and influenced by Chinese wisdom traditions, particularly by Confucianism and Taoism. As I have discussed in chapter one, Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism as the underpinning philosophical and cultural traditions of Chinese society have formed Chinese social customs and norms and shaped Chinese societal views on pedagogic relationships and the purpose of education.

Although the school and curriculum structure in China has been greatly influenced by theories and practices developed in other countries, such as the former Soviet Union and the United States, since the beginning of 20th century, the current pedagogic relationships and practices remain the same in many Chinese schools. The whole Chinese education system is still exam-orientated, which roots in the long educational tradition in China. Many students and teachers view obtaining good exam scores as the core of good learning and teaching as students' exam score and the rate of passing various standard tests are the main tools used to evaluate students' and teachers' performance and efficiency. Although the new curriculum gives teachers and schools the freedom to choose and adopt different curriculum resources and textbooks, teaching according to the only one textbook decided by provincial or prefectural educational departments is still common. As I have discussed in Chapter One, after a century's educational reform, educational practices in China are still characterized by content/teacher-centered and exam-oriented practices. This phenomenon is obviously evident in Western China, based on the conversations with teachers in this study.

The reasons for theses inveterate educational practices are twofold. First, Chinese teachers take pride of the Chinese philosophical and

educational traditions. *教书育人* (teaching the book and cultivate the person) , *传道授业解惑* (explain idea, impart knowledge, and resolve doubts), 和谐 (harmony), *统一* (unity), *中庸* (the Middle Way), the important educational and philosophical concepts developed from Chinese traditions, have become the core of their personal and professional identities. Second, teachers are not systematically supported in connecting their learning and practices and the old and the new in the process of curriculum implementation. All teacher participants in this study expressed their concern and frustration of the failed recognition of the excellence embedded in Chinese educational traditions in the new curriculum, which explains why new educational thoughts and pedagogy introduced to Chinese teachers through new curriculum and teacher training sessions have been viewed as *excellent* but *inapplicable* in the Chinese context. As expressed by one teacher participant, it is not possible to fully understand and implement the new curriculum unless teachers can fully understand how Chinese wisdom traditions have shaped their understanding about curriculum, teaching, and learning.

Although Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism are identified as the cultural roots of Chinese society, they are hardly identifiable in curriculum and have become like a "wandering ghost" (Zhang, 2008, p. 335) in both

Chinese society and education. In the disguise of curriculum reform, the epistemology adopted by the new curriculum demonstrates a profound 'copying' character; the instrumental curriculum implementation suggests a foreseeable failing outcome, particularly in teachers' understanding and interpreting of the new curriculum in practice.

In this study, teacher participants have suggested, revisiting Chinese wisdom traditions can function as a new lens for understanding the new curriculum and expressed their strong desire of making connections between the 'foreign' educational epistemology and the Chinese philosophical and educational wisdoms. Inspired by teachers' silenced desires of searching Chinese wisdom traditions in this dramatic educational change, I recommend *curriculum wisdom* as a new discourse and the basis for conducting transnational curriculum dialogue. *curriculum wisdom* can be imagined as an inter-disciplinary and umbrella term for understanding curriculum, especially in international and cross-cultural contexts, through the lens of wisdom traditions. The word of 智慧 (wisdom) indicates the holistic integration of knowledge, understanding, and experience with the capacity to apply these qualities well towards finding solutions to problems. In my vision, *curriculum wisdom* will not only lay a path for us to understand the boundaries and

possibilities of conducting complicated conversations (Pinar, 2004) or transnational conversations (Gough, 2003) about curriculum, but will also make such conversations culturally inclusive, meaningful and sustainable.

Gough (2007) argued that curriculum studies and conversations are not yet complicated or culturally inclusive because they remain dominated by scholars who work in Eurocentric scholarly traditions. I would argue that for many scholars conversing with and writing about other scholarly traditions is a very challenging task, even if they are willing to do so, because of the barriers of language and culturally defined educational background, perspectives, and scholarly experiences. By advocating the discourse of curriculum wisdom in curriculum studies, I see the opportunities for myself and other curriculum scholars to grow the awareness, capacities, and competencies to intellectually break through our own curriculum traditions and generate productive agendas in transnational curriculum inquiry. Such inquiry will in turn inform us how to deal with the difficult issues in curriculum understanding and educational change.

Educational Hermeneutics （教育阐释学）

This hermeneutic study and those conversations I had with teacher

participants present unique educational qualities and opportunities that we have never experienced in our formal classroom learning experiences. This experience enables me to see the value of recognizing *educational hermeneutics* as an important discourse in educational research and teacher education in China. The essential relationships between hermeneutics and education has been thoroughly discussed in the work of other scholars (Gallagher, 1992; Jardine, 2006), however, how hermeneutics may help educators interpret the new curriculum and negotiate cultural difference has not been well understood. By advocating educational hermeneutics as an important discourse in teacher education and education change in China, I am suggesting a new lens of understanding teachers' day-to-day experience in education change, what teaching means to teachers and learning means to students, what we understand curriculum, knowledge, tradition, language, creativity, pedagogical relationships, and the methods of good pedagogy to be.

In the process of becoming more informed in hermeneutic understanding, it becomes clear to me that all educational activities have hermeneutic feature - the intention of conceiving and constituting the meaning, the process of expanding horizons in historical context. However, these features are quite often unrecognized and

under-estimated, especially in prescribed large scale education reforms and new curriculum implementation processes. *Educational hermeneutics*, a discourse emphasizing the interpretive nature of curriculum implementation and the existential-ontological characteristic of educational experiences, may be employed as an approach of recognizing and negotiating different historical and cultural horizons in curriculum understanding and implementation.

In the context of Chinese basic education curriculum reform, the new curriculum and educational theories appear to be foreign to teachers. Examining teachers' experiences in engaging with this new curriculum through hermeneutics provides educators a unique perspective of understanding the mutual engagement between self and the other, and between experience and knowledge. In addition to the growth towards "fusion of horizons" (Gadamer, 1989, 276-277), hermeneutics alerts us to become more sensitive to differences we encounter everyday and historically conscious during the processes of dramatic educational changes.

CHAPTER 9 HERMENEUTIC INQUIRY AS LIVED PEDAGOGY

The conversational quality of hermeneutic truth points to the requirement that any study carried on in the name of hermeneutics should provide a report on the researcher's own transformations undergone in the process of inquiry.

DAVID G. SMITH, 1991

We've only had conversations for six hours, however, I have learned so much from them and your research method opened my eyes. I learned the importance of raising questions. These conversations motivated me to make up my minds to change in teaching.

ZHANG LAOSHI, 2007

Introduction

My interest in teachers' experiences in curriculum reform is, in part, a response to the hard questions I encountered during my engagement with curriculum change in China and to an unsettling sense of fragmentation that I have observed in my work with Chinese teachers. Although this doctoral program ends with the final submission of this writing, the learning journey inspired by this study is one without destination. Through this hermeneutic inquiry, I came to gradually understand why interpretive work always involves the task of *application* (Gadamer, 1989, pp.307-334) and how living through curriculum change is a life that embraces the very difficulties, ambiguities, sufferings, hopes, and

possibilities in dramatic education change.

I began this study with a practical concern of understanding teachers' lived experiences in curriculum change through an interpretive approach. However, the process of identifying the research question, accessing a research site, conversing with teacher participants, and finally writing and interpreting teachers' lived experiences enabled me to understand how "epistemology and ontology, knowing and being, lost their distinct and sometimes lonely character" (Jardine et al., 2003, p. 191) in an interpretive study.

The process of interpreting the texts and writing this dissertation was full of moments during which I consciously and unconsciously reflected the changes and insights I gained from this study. I would like to discuss these changes and insights from personal and academic perspectives.

Insights on My Own Identity

The increased awareness of my own identity that I experienced during this research journey was beyond my expectations. As I engaged in autobiographical writing in order to seek the connections between self and the research topic, I quickly realized I was facing a hard and fearful enterprise. However, in this difficulty, I began to better know myself from

bravely revealing my own schooling, teaching, and my inner psychological responses to the cross-cultural educational and professional experiences I have lived. The psychoanalytical reflections on my learning and professional journey makes me feel like I am going through a storm in the same boat with the research participants, with ups and downs, joys and challenges, and experiencing pride and loss. During the process of seeking meanings and understandings, I feel empowered by attempting to understand and to be understood. The concepts of understanding and interpretation have become an integrated part of my life. I find myself unconsciously using them in daily and academic talks on and on. The mental strength I gained from these concepts is like a light tower showing me the direction in the face of educational, social, and cultural, and personal challenges I encounter on a daily basis.

As this learning experience happened mostly in Canada, a country far away from my homeland, the personal, professional, social, cultural aspects of growth are naturally intertwined through its process. As an educator from China, a woman international student, a mother, a wife, and a daughter, I encountered many challenges, struggles, as well as excitements during this learning journey. Most importantly I embraced the privilege of being enriched and empowered by situating my learning

between times, cultures, spaces, and societies. My sense of being a responsible educator, a mindful researcher, a global citizen, and as one with the capacity of understanding and enjoying learning, is not merely manifested in what I look like, how I do, and where I have traveled, but more precisely manifested in how I think, feel, understand, and appreciate. This growth, realized beyond my expectation, is the one I am more interested in sharing with family, friends, colleagues, and all other people I have met and will meet in the future.

Insights on Academic Growth

At the beginning of this study, I did not expect to learn so much about philosophy, curriculum, education, teachers, students, and myself. I have been forced, in my reading and writing, to overcome the desire of presenting significant solutions to problems and issues. In reflecting and writing this dissertation, my enjoyment comes from interpreting texts, representing meanings, and provoking understandings and possibilities. The latter is more meaningful and important for me as I believe provoking new thoughts, understandings, knowledge, and possibilities should be the most important goal of research in education science. Asking teachers to express their difficulties in curriculum reform, I embraced anew the

original difficulty of living through curriculum change. Refusing to remain aloof, imprisoned behind the closed door of strategic certainties of implementing the new curriculum, I experienced with them how challenging it is to meet the complex demands of this massive change.

For me, interpretive research is not just one more methodology I learned through my graduate study. It is, instead, a lived pedagogy that embraces the very difficulties, ambiguities, suffering, and resistance that so much educational change research and practice seems determined to eradicate. I began with some kind of practical concern for finding ways to help teachers reduce the difficulties in implementing the new curriculum. However, my own thinking, reading, and writing about the particular texts and experiences on curriculum reform became far more than a dissertation. Rather, my own hermeneutic experience moved me into new spaces in which epistemology and ontology, knowing and being, the conscious and the unconscious, the spoken and the silent, lost their distinct and sometimes lonely features. It moved teacher participants and me into a space in which *living through curriculum change* became the text of our lives as teachers. These new spaces created by this hermeneutic experience will be lived pedagogy I would embrace, share, and promote in my future academic and professional endeavours.

The conscious and unconscious dynamics in generating meanings of change and the desire to understand these constructs is an important learning aspect of this study; though it's difficult. I experienced the 'interpretive paradox' (Britzman, 2003, p. 759) quite frequently in writing this dissertation; that is, I wrestled with the complexities and difficulties of making meanings of the new curriculum and the obstacles of representing the complexity and difficulty of these meanings in a language other than Chinese. These dilemmatic moments during which I struggled with interpreting experiences, curriculum, concepts, and cultural collisions in change represent my efforts and expanded horizon in understanding the 'difficult knowledge' held in curriculum studies and teacher education.

Hermeneutic inquiry as an interpretive methodology demonstrates its unique contributions to educational research in China. Although students' life experiences have become an important component of the new curriculum, teachers' lived experiences in the process of change have not been fully recognized and investigated in educational research and practices. A large number of educational research projects about the Chinese national curriculum reform are undertaken each year, but what is missing from these research projects are the voices of the teachers themselves, the questions teachers ask, the ways teachers use in their

response to the new curriculum, and the interpretive frames teachers use to make meanings of their learning and the new curriculum. Therefore, this interpretive study represents my efforts to enrich the educational research and development activities in China.

Equally important, this study also offered a critical learning experience for the participants. In their comments and reflections on participating in this study, they indicated new understandings of what it means to conduct educational research; that is, research is not just about data collection from documents, reports, surveys, and interviews, but a responsible and ethical endeavour in understanding life experience and how we make and act upon the meanings out of it. Such research does not simply present scientific knowledge to be learned, but increases our deep engagement in and commitment to thoughtfulness and tact in facing the issues of change, curriculum, and pedagogy. It ultimately grants us as teachers the emancipatory and transformative power while maintaining our well-being in massive education change.

All participants of this study indicated that there were dramatic differences between this interpretive research project and the other research activities they were involved with before. I believe the points participants conveyed to me in their conversations and email

communications will be helpful for researchers who will conduct cross-cultural research in China. First, from the beginning of research planning till conducting conversations and communicating on transcripts, teacher participants were well informed and had observed how their thoughts on, words about, and experience in curriculum change are counted as important information for research data and findings. For them, this was a meaningful experience and different from their prior research involvement, from which findings were mostly generated from official reports, figures, and policies.

Second, participants' privacy and confidentiality was highly emphasized and respected in data collection process. Ethics review and approval is a standard requirement for research activities in North America; however, these standards are not strictly institutionalized and applied in educational research activities in China. The approaches for protecting participants' privacies and confidentialities sometimes seemed counter to local politics and authorities, but I found it very important for any cross-cultural research endeavours in China, particularly in the context of Western China where local authorities and politics play important roles in national or international research projects. It is not simply a way of showing how the researcher complies with contextual

consideration and ethic standards. Because the importance lies in providing teachers a safe and open environment in which they can speak from their hearts and reality instead of following what was said in documents, policies, and school regulations.

Last, and the most important, the conversations and the interpretive feature of this study were a therapeutic touch for teacher participants. Teachers' voices are muted or rarely heard in this large scale educational change in China. The teacher participants, who live in one of the most remote regions in Western China, particularly appreciated opportunities to talk about their marginalized voices and experiences in adopting the new national curriculum and coping with the change. The interpretive, authentic, democratic, and collaborative efforts demonstrated to and experienced by teachers made them feel their desires for humanity and understanding in the dramatic change were attended and cared. One participant reflected later in his email that *"this study is about us, for us, and it'll be influential to many more teachers"(Shi Laoshi, 2008)* reminded me the importance of a teacher's ownership in any education research endeavours.

In conclusion, this study has been a transformative learning experience for me and the participants. As I have learned through this

study, hermeneutic inquiry embraces understanding, interpretation, and transformation. It offers unique insights and perspectives to the dramatic economic, educational, and social transformations undertaking in China. I believe this study invites a critical- even difficult- conversation about a foreseeable shift in educational science in China at the beginning of 21st century.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Invitation/Consent Letter for Teachers

Dear Teacher,

My name is Linyuan Guo and I am a graduate student at the University of Alberta, Canada working on my doctoral degree in Teacher Education and Curriculum Studies. I was a school teacher in China for ten years and have worked closely with school teachers in several provinces to implement the new curriculum in the past four years on an international teacher development project. I am writing to invite you to take part in a research project entitled ***A Hermeneutic Inquiry into the Meaning of Curriculum Reform for Chinese Teachers***. The aims of this research are to understand how teachers think about the meaning of the Basic Education Curriculum Reform in China and what influences their decision-making in translating the new curriculum into practice.

During the course of this research, you will be invited to participate in this research in the following ways:

- To take part in three audio-taped conversations with me to talk about your experiences and views about this curriculum reform.

The three conversations will be conducted within two to six weeks and each conversation will take approximately one to two hours to complete.

- To keep a research journal to reflect on the experience participating this study and how this research participation has influenced on your understanding of curriculum reform. This journal will be collected by the researcher at the end of conversations and will be returned to you by the end of the year 2007.

The following is a description of the proceedings that will take place in each conversation:

1. The first conversation will be our introductory discussion on our experiences in curriculum reform to become acquainted with each other. We'll also discuss what beliefs, values, and attitudes that you hold most strongly about your role as a classroom teacher.
2. In the second conversation we will use some curriculum policy and documents as reference to discuss the difference and connections between the new curriculum and the prior one. We'll look at how our past learning and teaching experiences influence our understanding and implementation of the new curriculum.

3. In the third conversation we talk about the in-service sessions you have been involved in curriculum change and what interventions have facilitated your translation of the new curriculum into practice. We'll also discuss new issues that have not been discussed in the prior conversations.

Participation in this research study is voluntary. You may withdraw from this research at any time without any negative consequences. The research conversations will be conducted at times which are convenient to you and at locations which are mutually agreeable.

Any information obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission. Names of all participants will be changed to ensure anonymity, and the name of the schools and other identifiers will also be kept anonymous to protect your identity from outsiders. All information collected –journal entries, tapes, transcripts, etc.imum of five years following completion of the project in a secure, locked cabinet.

By participating this study, you are contributing to a greater understanding how education reform in the future should position teachers in the change process and what teacher development programs

should incorporate to meet teachers' needs in implementing the new curriculum.

If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to email me at Linyuan@ualberta.ca or call me at 1-780-988 8857, or contact my Faculty Supervisor, Dr. Terry Carson by email (terry.carson@ualberta.caterry.carson@ualberta.ca) or phone 1.780. 492.3674. The plan for this study has been reviewed for its adherence to ethical guidelines and approved by the Faculties of Education, Extension and Augustana Research Ethics Board (EEA REB) at the University of Alberta. For questions regarding participant rights and ethical conduct of research, contact the Chair of the EEA REB at 1.780.492.3751.

Your signature on the bottom of this letter indicates that you have read and understand the information provided above, that you willingly agree to participate, that you may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation with penalty, and that you will not be identifiable in any documents resulting from this research.

Yours sincerely,

Linyuan Guo

Consent Form

I, _____ (Print Name of Participant), herby consent to participate in the "A Hermeneutic Inquiry into the Meaning of Curriculum Reform for Chinese Teachers" research being undertaken by Linyuan Guo, at the University of Alberta. By signing this consent form, I understand that:

- I may withdraw from the research at any time without penalty.
- All information gathered will be treated confidentially and discussed only with the research personnel.
- Any information that identities me will be destroyed upon completion of this research.
- I will not be identifiable in any documents resulting from this research.

_____ _____

(Signature) (Date)

_____ _____

(Email) (Phone Number)

_____

(Mailing Address)

Appendix B

Guiding Questions for Research Conversations

Dear teacher,

My research is to investigate what this curriculum reform means to you as a teacher, with a focus on your view of the factors influencing curriculum understanding and implementation. My primary concern is how you understand the demands brought to you by this new curriculum? How you view the relationships between the new curriculum and the prior one? What interventions are helpful and meaningful to help you understand and translate the new curriculum into practice? I am also interested in some more general feelings you have on what it means to live through this reform as a teacher.

The following questions are a guide for you to be prepared for our research conversations. Questions could be changed and expanded based on the context and conduct of the conversations.

First conversation:

1. How long have you been teaching in school(s)? In what subject area(s)? Use stories or examples to describe your beliefs of good teaching, learning, pedagogical relationships, and other aspects

of your professional life before the curriculum reform?

2. When did you start using the new curriculum? Explain or give some examples of your attitude, values, and actions relevant to curriculum change.
3. Based on your understanding of the *Basic Education Curriculum Reform Outline* and *Subject Curriculum Standards*, what does good teaching and learning mean to you now? What are the connections and/or differences between your prior beliefs and values and the current ones generated from the new curriculum? How is the new curriculum relevant to and different from the traditional education practices and values?
4. Using the *Basic Education Curriculum Reform Outline* and *Subject Curriculum Standards* as reference, identify the new or difficult concepts, ideas, or content for you to understand or translate into practice and explain the reasons through illuminating the changes you've made, the changes you are trying to make, and the changes you feel will never happen in your situations.

Second conversation:

5. What does it mean to you to realize the demanded changes by the new curriculum? Use examples or stories to explain your

feelings, emotions, beliefs, and experiences involved in the change process.

6. What in-service opportunities and activities relevant to curriculum reform have you been involved and for what purposes? Are these in-service sessions helpful and meaningful for you to make the change? Why or why not?
7. What constraints or concerns do you have in making the changes? In what ways do you see the in-service sessions have helped you deal with these concerns or constraints? What could be done to help you better deal with the difficulties and issues in using the new curriculum?
8. Are there any differences in your lesson planning after using the new curriculum? why or why not?
9. How do you view your prior educational (learning and teaching) experience on your decision-making process now? Do you think this is an important factor influencing your current education practice? And explain why or why not.

Third conversation:

10. What does it mean to you to implement the new curriculum?
11. Use stories or anecdotes to describe the problems and

achievements in your curriculum implementation? What factors have caused these problems or contribute to these achievements? What is your individual role in dealing with these problems and issues?

12. What is a successful curriculum implementation like in your own situation?
13. What has it been like for you as an individual to participate in this study? Has it had influence on your understanding and implementing the new curriculum? In what way?